

Due to general elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), all air, land, and sea borders were closed for 24 hours on Wednesday December 20, 2023.

Borders will be closed from 00:01 to 23:59 on Wednesday, according to the General Directorate of Migration.

“Domestic flights have been suspended, however, international flights are unaffected” the statement further read.

Approximately 44 million registered voters, out of a total population of around 100 million, are called upon to elect their president, as well as national and provincial deputies and, for the first time, municipal councilors.

Another first is that Congolese in the diaspora are voting in five countries.

Over 100,000 candidates are in the running for the four elections.

The President of electoral authorities in the DRC, Céni, Denis Kadima, pledged transparency in the process, with real-time monitoring of results compilation.

Withal, he did not specify when the first results would be posted in an operation center specially set up in Kinshasa.

Several election observation missions are deployed.

Sources from Central African Nations have reported that the first voter was spotted casting their ballot at 06:09 (04:09 GMT) in a polling station in Kisangani, located in the eastern part of the country, which, being an hour ahead of the west, began voting first.

The scheduled opening hours for polling stations are from 06:00 to 17:00 local time.

In this single-round election, 60-year-old Félix Tshisekedi, in power since early 2019, is running for a second term against 18 other candidates. His record is mixed, which he acknowledges, but he is asking for five more years to “consolidate the achievements.”

His main challenger, 58-year-old Moïse Katumbi, a wealthy businessman and former governor of the mining province of Katanga (southeast), has been particularly targeted by his attacks.

Other presidential candidates are Martin Fayulu, 67, who claims victory was stolen from him in the 2018 election, and Dr. Denis Mukwege, 68, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate for his work on behalf of raped women, known worldwide but a political novice.

The United States on Tuesday called on electoral authorities to be transparent in announcing the results of Wednesday's elections, following missed deadlines in 2019.

While US diplomacy praised the work of the DRC's electoral commission Denis Kadima, saying, "Additional measures to ensure the transparency of the electoral process, including clear information on when and how results will be published, would help build confidence," US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters.

"We urge all candidates and parties to do their part in promoting fair and free elections, with a peaceful and credible process", he said, also calling on the government to "maintain freedom of expression".