UK charity rebuffs ties to Republic of Congo leader

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<https://www.dw.com/en/uk-charity-rebuffs-ties-to-republic-of-congo-leader/a-48754349>

According to [a report published Wednesday](https://www.financeuncovered.org/uncategorized/prince-michael-brazzaville-foundation-bell-pottinger-jean-yves-ollivier-congo-sassou-nguesso-denies-reputation-laundering/) by London-based Finance Uncovered, the Brazzaville Foundation, which has Prince Michael of Kent as its patron, has some questions to answer in relation to its work and connections to the longtime president of the Republic of Congo, Denis Sassou N'Guesso.

The foundation was set up in 2014 to focus on environmental challenges, Libyan peace and the problem of fake medicines in Africa. But Congolese experts and opposition activists believe some of the foundation's activities serve to burnish the reputation of Sassou N'Guesso, helping to support his authoritarian and kleptocratic regime.

"Image laundering efforts help sustain Sassou N'Guesso's rule, with all the corruption and human rights violations it entails," Brett Carter, assistant professor in the School of International Relations at the University of Southern California, told Finance Uncovered.

"Sassou N'Guesso has now had his two chief opponents in the 2016 presidential election sentenced to 20 years of forced labor."

**Links to Prince Michael, UK PR firm**

Sassou N'Guesso has been in power in the oil-rich nation since 1997. The foundation was set up by French commodities trader Jean-Yves Ollivier, who has known Sassou N'Guesso for more than 30 years, with a multimillion payment from an oil deal he brokered with the president, according to Finance Uncovered.

Ollivier established the foundation with the help of Lord Tim Bell, a former PR guru for Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, according to the report.

Bell's company advised Sassou N'Guesso for the 2015 constitutional referendum which was instrumental in keeping him in power. Bell's firm Bell Pottinger collapsed in 2017 following its campaign for the [Guptas, a politically-connected business family in South Africa](https://www.dw.com/en/south-africa-drops-finance-minister-in-connection-to-state-capture-scandal/a-45825836).

Prince Michael, the cousin of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, became a foundation trustee in 2014. Three years later he was joined by Nicholas Chance, his former private secretary.

According to the report, Michael traveled to Sassou N'Guesso's hometown of Oyo in 2017 to launch the Congo Basin Blue Fund which aims to attract investment into the region.

**'Foundation's initiatives are its own'**

The foundation's chief executive, Sir David Richmond, told journalists at Finance Uncovered in a statement that "neither [Sassou N'Guesso], his government nor any Congolese citizen has any involvement in the running of the foundation."

"The foundation's various initiatives are its own," Richmond said. "Some have involved or been supported by President Sassou N'Guesso and the Republic of the Congo, alongside many other African countries; some, like our work on migration in West Africa, have not."

The report concluded: "The Republic of Congo is currently offering 18 new oil exploration licenses. Ollivier would not comment on whether he is involved in any bidding for any of them."