

The First Registering Balloon in the Skies over the DR Congo:

“There goes the balloon!”

Kinshasa . - For the very first time in Congolese history a registering balloon has taken to the skies – and it is a German one. This event was preceded by numerous talks held between members of the German Geo Info service with the country’s authorities in Kinshasa: “As of now the forecasts will even be more exact than they were previously,” said a pleased Major Achim Becker, Chief Geo Info Cell.

The soldiers have been in Kinshasa since 18 July 2006 in order to implement the EUFOR mission which is to support free elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The task of Geo Info is to provide advice to aircraft pilots in the planning of their flights. Currently, three CH-53 helicopters are based at Kinshasa and their pilots are effectively the “main customers” of the German Bundeswehr Geo Info service.

The circumference of the registering balloon is 1.50m when grounded. In mid-air it can expand to a maximum 20m. This is possible due to the atmospheric pressure decreasing in higher altitudes. The soldiers start the radiosondes twice daily. Equipped with electronics in order to measure the atmospheric pressure, humidity and temperature, and to transmit the relevant data to the “weathermen” as the Geo Info personnel occasionally like to call themselves. However, the balloon also supplies information on the wind direction and speed should the radiosonde drift off: This information arrives on the ground near N’dolo airport. The Geo Info personnel are based right next to the Army Aviation hangar, so they can keep in permanent and direct contact.

“Even a long-serving meteorologist’s heart is warming when he watches the balloon’s long cruise over the equator before it disappears into the clouds”, says Major Achim Becker, going into raptures.

Wirtten by: Major Holger Bosch

