



Congo Initiative Advocacy Brief: Peace, Human Rights and the Conflict over the Congo's Mineral Resources

Decades of violence urge the Church to respond

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has suffered from the deadliest global conflict since World War II, and the worst exploitation of the country and its people since the brutal rule of Belgian King Leopold II in the late 19th century. Since the 1990s, nearly 5 million people died and 2 million were displaced as a result of two civil wars that erupted from ethnic conflicts in Eastern Congo and were stoked by Congo's neighbors and those battling for power after the ousting of U.S.-backed dictator Mobutu Sese Seku in 1997.

Yet even after a peace agreement was signed in 2003, Congo's government has remained tenuous and violence has continued to flare up in the nation's eastern provinces throughout this decade. As recently as November 2012, rebels backed by Rwanda took control of the border city Goma, battling both United Nations peacekeepers and Congo Army forces. Although the United Nations, African and other international parties helped the DRC negotiate a withdrawal of the rebels, these and other armed militants remain spread throughout the Congo, continuing to threaten the civilian population and Congo's sovereignty.



Violence and instability have persisted in the Congo largely as a result of the country's abundant oil, timber and other natural resources. The Congo's recent conflicts and much of the challenge the government has in securing the interests of the nation are as a result of the tremendous natural wealth of the country. The Congo's valuable resources make it a battleground for those who want to profit from the resources, while the people have benefitted little and lost much. Despite its valuable resources, Congolese annual income is \$300. Eighty percent of the population survives on less than a dollar a day and the UN estimates that 75% of the population is undernourished. Over a million Congolese remain displaced due to violence and poverty, nearly two-thirds of the population do not have access to adequate health care, and an estimated 1.1 million are living with HIV/AIDS.

As a result of our deep relationships in the Congo, our churches have made standing with the people of the Congo to oppose this violence and exploitation a priority. In 2011 the Disciples General Assembly and UCC General Synod each passed resolution entitled "A Call for Reflection and Advocacy on Behalf of the Democratic Republic of the Congo." The resolution aims "to raise awareness of and engage settings of the church in advocacy regarding the violent conflicts and human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, related especially to the exploitative mining of resources for export and industrial application"... and calls on the church to "reflect and advocate on behalf of sisters and brothers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo."

- **The Global Ministries 2013-2014 Congo Initiative provides opportunities for the Church to respond on behalf of peace and solidarity with our partners.**

How “conflict minerals” fuel violence in the Congo

The Congo has been called the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today as a result of decades of civil war and ongoing conflicts in the East of the country. The control over minerals and other natural resources have caused much of the conflict in the Congo. The Congo is about half the size of the U.S., but with little infrastructure connecting major population centers in the East and West of the country. Today the DRC struggles to maintain control over its interior provinces and abundant mineral resources.

What is Coltan?

Coltan is short for Columbite-tantalite - a black tar-like mineral more abundant in the Congo than anywhere else in the world. Since it holds a high electric charge, Coltan has become indispensable in the manufacture of high-tech electronic devices like mobile phones.

A technological society cannot do without this valuable mineral, but should companies that mine and trade coltan and similar materials be accountable to ensure they are “conflict-free”? How can we make sure our consumer choices don’t contribute to human-rights violations and further exploit the Congo and its people?

There is intensive industrial and small-scale extraction of Congo’s timber, ore, and oil. Many international companies are invested in the country, cutting deals with government or powerful interests while exporting both the materials and most of the profits from these enterprises. Therefore there is relatively little benefit to average Congolese in terms of jobs, community development or economic investment in areas outside of the industries themselves.

Instead the people of Congo generally suffer from these extractive industries, whether due to poor employment conditions in official operations, or frequently from the intense violence afflicted on civilians by the many armed groups looting these resources for personal gain or to fund rebel ventures against the government. With little control by the either Congo’s military or the UN troops, Congo’s natural wealth is therefore systematically exploited by neighboring countries and international corporations from the outside,

and both corrupt elites and violent insurgents from the inside.

The extraction of valuable minerals has an especially heavy impact on civilians. Besides rich gold, diamond and copper deposits, the Congo has 70% of the world’s coltan reserves. Coltan is increasing in values due to its critical application in electronics and high-end manufacturing. The conflict in Eastern Congo in recent years has been centered around armed militias, often controlled by Congo’s neighbors in the region, scrambling to control the land and labor to obtain these valuable minerals. Besides the killing and mass displacement of civilians, human rights abuses have included the conscription of child soldiers, capture of children to work in mines, and the widespread use of rape and Gender-Based Violence as a weapon of war. The United Nations has estimated as many as 45,000 women were raped in a year in regions affected by the conflict.

What can the U.S. do to control conflict minerals?

Greater transparency is needed in the investment and operation of mining in the Congo to prevent the trafficking of conflict minerals. U.S. laws governing U.S. investments in companies doing business in other countries are designed to protect the human rights and national sovereignty of those countries. However companies often escape oversight by hiding behind sub-contractors and by transporting tainted resources through third countries before placing them on the global market. In the Congo, militias vie for trade routes by which to transport conflict-minerals into Rwanda and Uganda.

Without a strong commitment to transparency and standards for supply chain accountability, American consumers have no way to ensure that their purchases are not financing armed groups implicated in violence and human rights abuses, including mass rape.

The 2010 Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act included efforts to hold corporations more accountable. Section 1502 of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) rules, finalized in 2012, explicitly requires companies to exercise “due-diligence” to verify minerals they obtain from the DRC and its neighboring countries to be “conflict-free.” A second provision, Section 1504, requires any U.S. or foreign oil, gas and mining companies listed on U.S. exchanges to publish all payments to US and foreign governments in their annual reports. Given efforts by industry groups to find loopholes or have the rules overturned, public vigilance is required to ensure federal enforcement and industry compliance.

- **To highlight the need for U.S. leadership in stopping conflict-minerals, groups can participate in the annual “Cell Out” digital fasting campaign. Let Congress know you support the SEC rules and additional global mechanisms for regulating mining and other extractive industries in the Congo.**

How can the U.S. make sustainable peace in the Congo a priority?

To push for peace in the Congo, U.S. policy should seek to secure DRC control over Eastern Congo and its mineral resources. The U.S. should provide humanitarian aid and support for those displaced by the 2012 violence around Goma, as well as increase support for U.N. peacekeeping operations in the Congo to protect civilians and especially women. In addition the U.S. and other countries should enforce sanctions not only on militias but also on the foreign officials sponsoring them.

In November 2012, a UN Group of Experts documented evidence of numerous atrocities attributed to the M23 rebels and verified links between the militia and contacts in Rwanda and Uganda. Since external governments like Rwanda and Uganda have long sponsored rebel militias inside the DRC, a regional agreement is necessary to create sustainable peace in the Congo. In February 2013 various parties in the African Great Lakes region signed the “Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework”—an initiative that increases international support and regional buy-in into a sustainable peace between the DRC and its neighbors. It includes strengthening and reforming government mechanism inside the DRC and increasing donor support and accountability among Congo’s neighbors and the international community.

Recent Congressional Resolutions (S.Res. 144 and H.Res. 131) “Concerning the Ongoing Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Need for International Efforts toward Long-term Peace, Stability, and Observance of Human Rights” call for the U.S. to support the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework and to take serious the existing Public Law 109-456 that strengthens the DRC and sanctions countries like Uganda and Rwanda that destabilize it. They urge more robust U.S. commitment to establishing security and the territorial sovereignty of the DRC—by strengthening the UN Peacekeeping force (MONUSCO) in the Congo, developing a comprehensive strategy to promote peace in the Congo and accountability for human rights violations and war crimes committed in the conflict, increasing international cooperation to prevent the flow of conflict-minerals and other illegal goods out of the Congo, and appointing a Special Envoy to the African Great Lakes region, which was fulfilled by naming former Sen. Russ Feingold to the post in 2013.

- **The U.S. must make peace in Congo and the region a priority. Join Global Ministries in urging Congress and the Administration to enforce Public Law 109-456, supporting the DRC and sanctioning countries like Uganda and Rwanda that destabilize it.**

What Can I Do to Support Peace in the Congo?

Be Informed

- UCC and Disciples resolutions (2011) www.globalministries.org/africa/congo-week calling for “Reflection and Advocacy on Behalf of the Congo”
- Enough Project “Raise Hope for Congo” Campaign www.raisehopeforcongo.org
- Friends of the Congo www.friendsofthecongo.org

Take Action

- Connect through Global Ministries updates and Facebook pages, Justice and Peace Action Network and Disciples Justice Action Network
- Send “Dear John [Kerry]” postcards www.congojustice.org/postcard urging the U.S. to enforce Public Law 109-456 supporting the DRC and sanctioning countries like Uganda and Rwanda that destabilize it.
- Find out which high-tech companies are conflict-free: www.raisehopeforcongo.org/companyrankings
- Speak out against global violence against women on November 25 with *UNite to Say No to Violence* www.saynotoviolence.org and *We Will Speak Out* www.wewillspekout.us

Organize for Congo Week in October

- Plan worship during Congo Week using resources from the Congo Initiative.
- Invite a speaker from the Congo or to introduce Congo Week.
- Observe the “Cell Out” campaign during Congo Week to raise awareness about conflict minerals in the Congo. How can your group be “conflict-free”?
- Show a documentary like *Half the Sky* to talk about violence against women in the Congo www.halftheskymovement.org
- Join a run/walk or swim event benefiting Congo women through *Congo Swim* www.congoswim.org or *Women for Women International* www.womenforwomen.org



October 19-25, 2014

Congo Week www.congoweek.org raises awareness about the violence in the Congo and focuses advocacy on the need for peace, justice and human dignity in partnership with the Congolese people. Many churches plan events during Congo Week to learn about, worship, and advocate for peace in the Congo.

“**The Cell Out**” is a cell phone shut-down held Noon - 1pm on the Wednesday of Congo Week. It calls attention to conflict minerals like the coltan in our cell phones. Armed groups in the Congo fight over the mining of precious minerals, and their international sale helps finance the continuing conflict in the region.

For more information, contact Global Ministries Advocacy and Education:

Derek Duncan duncand@ucc.org or Rev. Shernell Edney sedney@dom.disciples.org