



CASE BACKGROUND

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, formally Zaire, is complex, complicated by the struggle for power over the country's vast resources by actors within and outside Congo. In recent years, one particular mineral, Coltan, has been at the center of the fight. The precious ore is mined in rebel-controlled areas at the expense of national parks and depletion of wildlife. The market for the mineral has greatly increased in recent years, exacerbating conflict in Congo.

Coltan, short for Columbite-tantalite, is essential for the power-storing parts of cell phones, nuclear reactors, Play Stations, and computer chips. Coltan is increasingly exploited in the mountains in the conflict torn eastern part of the country. The Rwanda and Uganda backed rebels have primary control over the ore and are reaping huge profits which maintain and finance the protracted war. It is estimated that the Rwandan army made \$20 million per month mining coltan since 2000. Since coltan is necessary for the high-tech industry, and as demand increases, motivation to pull out of the DRC by Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi decreases. The wealthy countries, who are the main buyers of coltan at the end of the chain, seem to turn a blind eye to its origin, and there seems to be very little willingness to address the issue or even identify it.

Farmers have been forced off their land or into mining as war has ravaged their land. Miners threaten the environment of eastern lowland gorillas. Miners are killing elephants and gorillas on wildlife reserves and national parks. While the numbers of wildlife are dwindling, the environment is being degraded.

Coltan mining provides great wealth for warring sides, takes away the livelihoods of people who live on the land, and destroys wildlife.

The continuing conflict fueled by the exploitation of coltan and other minerals has pushed the DRC, particularly the eastern part into worsening humanitarian situation. Human and food insecurity are increasing. Rwandan and Ugandan backed rebels are guilty of torturing, attacking, and killing innocent civilians in order to establish their own rule of law. Many children are subjected to forced recruitment for mining, fighting, and sex work. Violence against women and prostitution has increased significantly, but exact figures are not available. The UN observer mission in the DRC estimates that over two million Congolese are affected with HIV/AIDS. Health care services are severely lacking and 37% of the population lacks access to adequate medical facilities as much infrastructure has been damaged due to conflict. 47% of population lacks access to safe drinking water and more than half of the DRC's 50 million people eat less than two-thirds of the calories needed per day. GDP per capita in 1999 was \$78. Travel on roads is difficult and dangerous and trade patterns have been interrupted. This combined with disturbed planting seasons and lack of access to humanitarian assistance for three years, has left the northeastern province of Katanga very insecure. Millions remain vulnerable, particularly widows, the wounded, child soldiers, and the handicapped.

Source: <http://www.american.edu/TED/ice/iceall.htm>

CRISIS

Recently, the DRC has threatened to nationalize the coltan production and to reevaluate considerably its price. A 50% increase in coltan price would mean a lot to the DRC's economy, and yet would result in no more than a 10% increase at most of the prices of the finished products which require coltan to function. Main corporations who are the main buyers of coltan have repeatedly stated that rather than increase prices, they would rather massively invest in research into alternative technologies such as high tech ceramics – which would deprive the DRC of one of its main sources of income. The DRC argues that corporations should also fulfill a socially responsible role, but many corporations are firmly reminding that their goal is profit for the shareholder and low price for the consumer, and that fulfilling any social responsibility would impact negatively their main economic goals.

As the ECOSOC is gathered to debate the rights and responsibilities of multinational corporations, the Secretary General of the UN, who has been seized of the matter by the DRC, requests the commission to address the issue.