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**RESOURCE
CONFLICTS**

THE ROLE OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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Introduction

“This is all money”, says a Western mining executive, his hand sweeping over a geological map toward the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He is explaining why, in 1997, he and planeloads of other businessmen were flocking to the impoverished country and vying for the attention of then-rebel leader Laurent Kabila. (Dena Montague and Frida Berrigan 2001)

Most of conflicts worldwide are found in areas where natural resources are present. Multi-national corporations play a particularly significant role in the continuation of these conflicts. In the DRC, as the role of multi-national corporations in increasing conflicts becomes apparent, it is important to look closely at how to deal with this issue. The question is what to do with these corporations whose interests are becoming more important than the value of human being in conflict zones? In this module paper, I will examine how multinational corporations are involved in mineral business in the DRC, what is being done to address the problem and what the consequences are of the trade of minerals in DRC. This paper will be based on a theoretical descriptive approach relying on existing documents on the issue.

Multinational corporations in the DRC (Deval Desai and Natalie Zerial)

As the financial crisis continues, big corporations are being pressured to compensate for losses on the stock markets by engaging themselves in the illegal business and profiting from conflicts that have claimed millions of people’s lives outside their home countries including the DRC.

Since 1996, the DRC has been undergoing a conflict that has cost an estimated 5.4 million innocent lives. In 2008, the conflict in DRC took a new dimension that was not seen since 2003. Despite clear reports from the ground, a widespread looting, rape and killings of civilians in conflict zones, the international community has failed to take any actions against the actors in the conflict. They have, moreover, neglected the role of multinational corporations in the DRC conflict. (Share the World’s Resources – STWR)

According to a number of reports, multinational corporations play an important role in continuing the conflicts that have led to mass atrocities in the DCR. In 2001 for instance, the UN commissioned a report in which 85 companies were named for having “violated international standards of good corporate behavior, including the standards set out in the

guidelines for the ethical behavior of multinationals established by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).” (STWR)

According to the UN report, “Illegal exploitation of the mineral and forest resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is taking place at an alarming rate in two phases; mass-scale looting and the systematic and systemic exploitation of natural resources.” Corporations from around the world have sought to profit from exploiting the DRC’s natural resources on the cheap – particularly coltan, a mineral used to produce cell phones, laptops and video game consoles.” (UN report 2001:4)

The report also indicates that a number of companies were created to facilitate illegal activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Others have existed in the region for decades and joined the bandwagon to pursue the obvious financial windfalls involved in the exploitation of the country. On the Ugandan, MLC and RCD-ML side, rebel leaders and/or Ugandan military officials created new companies and businesses using prête-noms. Most, if not all, of these companies are privately owned by individuals or a group of individuals.

Among the companies mentioned by the report that are involved in the illicit acquisition of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Trinity and Victoria seem to be the most interesting given their modus operandi, activities and respective shareholders. Victoria Group is chaired by Mr Khalil and its headquarters is in Kampala. According to reliable sources, Mr. Khalil deals directly with Mrs. Akandwanaho on diamond issues. Mr. Khalil has two collaborators in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, based in Kisangani and Gbadolite. Both are said to be from Lebanon, they are Mohammed Gassan and Mr. Talal. During its visit to Gbadolite, the Panel received confirmation of the presence of one of them and his leading role in the purchase of diamonds in the region. A reliable source told members of the Panel that the Victoria Group belongs jointly to Muhoozi Kainerugabe, son of President Museveni, and Jovia and Khaleb Akandwanaho. Victoria Group is involved in trading diamonds, gold and coffee. The Group purchases these mineral and agricultural products in Isiro, Bunia, Bumba, Bondo, Buta and Kisangani. The company paid taxes to MLC, but failed to do so with RCD-ML. When counterfeit currencies (Congolese francs and United States dollars) were found in areas where the company buys the natural resources, fingers were pointed at the Victoria Group. Other sources have confirmed to the Panel the involvement of the Victoria Group in the making of counterfeit currency.

Trinity is an equally interesting case. Ateenyi Tibasima, second Vice-President of RCD-ML and now the Commissaire général adjoint of FLC, was the “manager” of the company. According to reliable sources, Trinity is a fictitious company and a conglomerate of various businesses owned by Salim Saleh and his wife. Its primary purpose was to facilitate their business activities in Orientale Province. To this end, Mr. Tibasima granted a tax holiday to all Trinity activities in the areas controlled by Uganda and administered by RCD-ML in November 1999. Trinity has imported various goods and merchandise and has taken from Orientale Province gold, coffee and timber without paying any tax. Different individuals, Ugandans as well as Congolese, have taken the opportunity created by the confusion over Trinity to export from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (on behalf of Trinity) various natural resources, also without paying taxes. (UN report 2001)

The UN report also highlighted that the demand in for the highly prized coltan has enormous impacts. According to the report, “given the substantial increase in the price of coltan between late 1999 and late 2000, a period during which the world supply was decreasing while the demand was increasing, a kilo of coltan of average grade was estimated at \$200. According to the estimates of professionals, the Rwandan army through Rwanda Metals was exporting at least 100 tons per month. The Panel estimates that the Rwandan army could have made \$20 million per month, simply by selling the coltan that, on average, intermediaries buy from the small dealers at about \$10 per kg. According to experts and dealers, at the highest estimates of all related costs (purchase and transport of the minerals), RPA must have made at least \$250 million over a period of 18 months. This is substantial enough to finance the war. Here lies the vicious circle of the war. Coltan has permitted the Rwandan army to sustain its presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The army has provided protection and security to the individuals and companies extracting the mineral. These have made money which is shared with the army, which in turn continues to provide the enabling environment to continue the exploitation.” (UN report 2001)

The report also found that Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundian rebels had looted and smuggled thousands of tons of coltan from the Congo into their countries to export to the global market, using the profits to finance their militias. Indeed, the official statistics provided by these countries' governments - which many human-rights observers believe hide large amounts of black-market trading - show that Uganda and Rwanda dramatically increased the export of coltan following their occupation of northeastern Congo. For example, Uganda reported 2.5 tons of coltan exports a year before the conflict broke out in 1997. In 1999, the volume

exploded to nearly 70 tons. Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi have issued protests to the United Nations over the report, claiming it to be inaccurate and unfounded.” (Anup Shah 2010)

In 2003, a followup report was made in which it was mentioned that, “in 1999 and 2000 a sharp increase in the world prices of tantalum occurred, leading to a large increase in coltan production in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Part of that new production involved rebel groups and unscrupulous business people forcing farmers and their families to leave their land, or chasing people off land where coltan was found and forcing them to work in artisanal mines. As a result, the widespread destruction of agriculture and devastating social effects occurred, which in a number of instances were akin to slavery.” (Anup Shah 2010)

In 2008, the UN issued another report in which it was revealed that coltan and other minerals continue to be taken out of the DRC while more money has been brought in. The report mentions that “in fact, last year’s foreign direct investment into the DRC was the highest in the history of U.N. records on trade and investment.” (str) This is particularly important because this money contributes to the conflict by providing financial support to groups involved in it. Among these groups are the Forces Democratiques de Liberation du Rwanda (FDLR) and the Coalition of Congolese Patriotic Resistance (PARECO), who have been accused of abducting children to use as soldiers and of raping and killing civilians.

When they carry out their business, multinational corporations that profit most from the conflicts often times “hide behind a carefully constructed shield of ignorance, arguing that they are not aware of the provenance of the minerals that they purchase.” However, these claims of ignorance are disingenuous at best: the latest UN report indicates that companies are carefully avoiding any investigations that might reveal the truth; further, corporate management refuses to perform sufficient due diligence regarding their suppliers, thus failing to meet minimum standards of ethical business conduct. Companies are certainly not going beyond this basic standard by taking steps to ensure that they are not purchasing conflict minerals. Instead, they continue to exploit Congo’s mineral wealth with insouciance. (STWR)

Domestic Corporate Accountability (STWR)

Given the clear violation of minimum standards of conduct by multinational corporations, one would ask, why do they continue to get away with their misbehaving? Are there some policymakers behind them? The political instability of the DRCT and the wealth of these companies make them almost untouchable when it comes to holding them accountable. The

home states of these corporations have been unwilling to control their companies business overseas. “Additionally, many companies use subsidiaries or trading partners located in the DRC to avoid liability in their home states, enabling them to deny their involvement while simultaneously reaping huge profits.”

International Corporate Accountability (STWR)

Internationally, different institutions “have sought to rein in corporate human rights violations, using measures such as reporting mechanisms, certification schemes and cooperative educational initiatives. None of these measures have been directed specifically at the problems facing the DRC, but rather focus on the global phenomenon of corporate misconduct. The proliferation of such measures demonstrates both the importance of this issue and the failure of the international community to arrive at a single, effective solution.”

This is not to say that these measures are without merit. Not only are they building awareness about the human rights obligations of businesses, within both the corporate sphere and the wider community, but they also contribute to ever-increasing expectations of appropriate corporate behavior. For instance, the UN Global Compact, which centers around a set of ten principles on human rights, the environment, labor and anti-corruption, describes itself as a leadership forum and a platform for the development and dissemination of corporate responsibility initiatives. Companies that choose to participate must sign a letter, committing themselves to upholding the Global Compact’s ten principles. However, they are not otherwise required to meet any standards of performance and are not subject to oversight, monitoring or reporting. While the Global Compact has been criticized significantly for its failure to exclude companies that fail to meet the ten principles, it must nonetheless be given credit for its wide reach, including 4700 businesses in 120 countries around the world.

Another significant international initiative is the OECD’s Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. They cover a wide range of areas, including human rights and the environment, and require companies to contribute to a country’s economic, social and environmental progress. Unlike the voluntary Global Compact, the OECD initiative seeks to regulate corporate behavior through governments. To this end, the adhering countries must establish a “National Contact Point” (NCP), which is responsible for promoting corporate responsibility and facilitating mutually agreed solutions for problems that arise in this area. To achieve these goals, NCPs are empowered to receive complaints about corporate misbehavior, and thus are, in theory, the closest thing to an actual accountability mechanism for corporations. However,

the OECD gives members absolute flexibility in designing their NCP, and most countries have failed to institute an effective complaints procedure or to ensure that their NCP has the status or profile necessary to put meaningful pressure on corporate actors. The US NCP, for instance, is one of many hats worn by the Office of Investment Affairs. It has no separate existence and lacks an institutional architecture. (STWR)

The report released by OECD in 2004 shows that governments have failed to investigate the alleged role of multinational corporations in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. (RAID 2004).

By contrast, the United Kingdom has given its NCP more teeth, allowing it to receive and examine evidence and issue public reports on corporate misbehavior. Yet even if the NCPs were to realize their potential, this mechanism still relies on the stigma of bad publicity rather than any judicial remedy – a strategy that only works when the reputational costs to the company are not outweighed by the material gains from engaging with states that are rich in minerals but poor in human rights governance. For example, the publicity surrounding the UN reports did little to halt the looting of the DRC: as recently as last summer it was revealed that a British company, Afrimex, had paid money to a rebel group responsible for serious human rights violations. In return, the rebel group allowed Afrimex to extract minerals from mines under its control - mines in which forced labor and life-threatening conditions were present. (RAID 2004)

The UN has acknowledged the need for greater oversight of multinational corporations and their impact on human rights. In 2005, Professor John Ruggie of the Harvard Kennedy School was appointed the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on business and human rights. Since his initial appointment, Professor Ruggie has conducted consultations across the globe, compiling information on the status of corporate accountability measures in various countries and at the transnational level. His results have revealed the widespread failure of states to ensure that corporations observe human rights. As corporations have fallen short of ethical standards, states have consistently failed to hold them accountable, and Ruggie last year called for proactive policy interventions by states to control the involvement of corporations in conflict situations. To this end, he has proposed a tripartite framework, encompassing the state's responsibility to protect against human rights violations, the general provision of adequate remedies to victims of human rights violations, and the corporate responsibility to respect human rights and operate in accordance with social expectations (that

is, respect the “social contract”). Ruggie is currently in the process of operationalizing this tripartite framework. Whether it will be adequate to address the manifold complexities raised by transnational corporate misconduct is yet to be seen— and for millions suffering in the DRC, it will also be too late. (RAID 2004)

For the international community, individual states and companies, the challenges are significant. Even companies with the best intentions need guidance to ensure that their money is not being funneled into the prolongation of a conflict or the perpetuation of human rights abuses. Unilateral measures by states must surmount the limitations of domestic law enforcement. Accountability across borders requires cooperation between both state and non-state actors. (STWR)

The resurgence of the conflict in the DRC and the brutality wrought upon civilians is a reminder that multinational companies cannot be allowed to give support to those that perpetrate atrocities. They cannot be allowed to turn a blind eye to the impact that they or their subsidiaries have in perpetuating a cycle of violence. The proliferation of corporate social responsibility slogans and industry self-regulation has not been sufficient to prevent corporate complicity in atrocities in the DRC. Society must insist that corporate accountability transcends borders. Governments must be proactive in monitoring and responding to the actions of their companies overseas. Otherwise, companies will continue to do business in war zones, where they are out of sight of regulators, with the invisible hand of the market pushing them towards profits – at the expense of principles. (Deval Desai 2001)

What makes it difficult to stop this business? (Kristi Essick 2001)

One of the main reasons why the conflicts in DRC have continued is because of the high demand for cell phones and computer chips as well as other electronics that have become a daily lifestyle especially in the Western world. This need is helping fuel a bloody civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

On one of the internet bulletin board that called the Embassy Network posted a number of things including one about Dutch work visas and Italian pen pals that lurked a surprisingly blunt proposal: "How much do you want to offer per kilogram? Please find me at least 100,000 U.S. dollars and I will deliver immediately."

The substance for sale wasn't cocaine or top-grade opium. It was an ore called Columbite-tantalite - coltan for short - one of the world's most sought-after materials. Once refined, coltan can be used to produce highly heat-resistant metal powder called tantalum. It sells for \$100 a pound, and it's becoming increasingly vital to modern life. For the high-tech industry, tantalum is magic dust, a key component in everything from mobile phones made by Nokia (NOK) and Ericsson and computer chips from Intel (INTC) to Sony (SNE) stereos and VCRs.

Not surprisingly, selling coltan is not illegal. Most of the worldwide tantalum supply - valued at as much as \$6 billion a year - comes from legitimate mining operations in Australia, Canada and Brazil. But as demand for tantalum took off with the boom of high-tech products in recent years, a new, more sinister market began flourishing in the Democratic Republic of Congo. There, warring rebel groups - many funded and supplied by neighboring Rwanda and Uganda - are exploiting coltan mining to help finance a bloody civil war. (Kristi Essick 2001)

These companies deny any knowledge that tantalum originating in the Congo is used in their products. That's not surprising, considering how murky the supply chain out of the Congo is and how complicated the global trade in tantalum gets. The reality is that there's little way to prove that the tantalum used in our cell phones and laptops is or is not from the Congo. Still, 8 percent of the tantalum ore imported into the United States in 1999 came from the Congo, and that doesn't count the ore U.S. companies imported from Rwanda and Uganda that may have originated in neighboring Congo. And there is much more of the precious dirt where that came from. At the moment, about 15 percent of the world's supply of tantalum comes from Africa. (Australia is the biggest producer, accounting for about 70 percent of the global supply of tantalum-bearing ore.) But the Congo is sitting on a potential gold mine. The mineral-rich nation is tied with Canada in having the world's fourth-largest coltan reserve, according to research firm Roskill Information Services. (Kristi Essick 2001)

The link between mineral business and abuse of human rights

The slaughter and misery in the Congo has not abated since 1998. Human Rights Watch estimates that at least 10,000 civilians have been killed and 200,000 people have been displaced in northeastern Congo since June 1999. Rebels have driven farmers off their coltan-rich land and attacked villages in a civil war raging, in part, over control of strategic mining areas. The control of mines has become a way of living for many groups in the DRC. The mining by the rebels is also causing environmental destruction. In particular, endangered

gorilla populations are being massacred or driven out of their natural habitat as the miners illegally plunder the ore-rich lands of the Congo's protected national parks.

The link between the bloodshed and coltan is causing alarm among high-tech manufacturers. Slowly they are beginning to grapple with the possibility that their products may contain the tainted fruits of civil war. A similar controversy, after all, wracked the diamond industry in the late 1990s, when global demand for the gems helped finance civil wars in Sierra Leone, Angola and Liberia. Since then, the international community has clamped down on the diamond trade, imposing tougher import and export regulations. (Kristi Essick 2001)

Consequences: Human Life

The humanitarian crisis in the DRC has been described as one of the worst in the world. The fighting has led to appalling levels of hunger, disease, and death, and to countless abuses of human rights. In the complex conflict in eastern Congo, all the many combatant forces have attacked civilians, killing, injuring and raping thousands of persons and causing more than half a million others to flee their homes. The High Commissioner also stressed that sexual violence remains a cause of major concern not only in the eastern part of the country but throughout the rest as well. From 30 July to 2 August 2010, at least 380 women, men and children were raped in 13 villages in Walikale territory, in North Kivu, by a group of armed men belonging to FDLR, members of Mai Mai Cheka and combatants affiliated with a former FARDC member who founded his own armed group in early 2010. Security forces reportedly also committed many rapes during the reporting period (Human Rights report 2011)

Consequences: Environment and Wildlife

The coltan trade and battle over the other minerals and resources has also affected DRC's wildlife and environment. The mining camps had a massive impact on local wildlife through commercial hunting for food, including the wholesale killing of endangered species such as Grauer's gorilla, which now faces extinction. Increasing poverty and hunger from the war, as well as more people moving into these areas to exploit the minerals results in hunting more wildlife, such as apes, for bush meat. Gorillas, for example are already endangered species. Wars over resources like this make the situation even worse. (Anup Shah 2010)

Coltan - The most wanted stone (Kristi Essick 2001)

Coltan - which is found in 3 billion-year-old soils, like those in the Rift Valley region of middle Africa, Western Australia and central Asia - has become a critical raw material in high-tech manufacturing. The tantalum extracted from the ore is used mainly to make tantalum capacitors, tiny components that manage the flow of current in electronic devices. Many semiconductors also use a thin layer of tantalum as a protective barrier between other metal coatings. The metal, which is also found in other minerals and can be extracted as a byproduct of tin refining, is used in the airline, chemical, pharmaceutical and automotive industries as well. (Kristi Essick 2001)

As digital technological development struggled to keep pace with global demand, the Congo—which holds an estimated 80% of the world's coltan—increasingly became tapped for its extensive reserves, most notably with the release of the Sony PlayStation 2 in 2000, when coltan prices spiked tenfold because of supply shortages. All of this accelerated violence in the Congo, as coltan was traded by local militias for munitions. These militias, largely composed of child soldiers, are particularly known for their viciousness, as they gang rape, plunder and murder the populations of villages that happen to fall in their path, a strategy of terror designed to facilitate regional domination and unfettered compliance among local populations. Ecological devastation was wrought as protected forests held refuge for warlords and the dwindling populations of gorilla and elephants were consumed by starving child soldiers and wayward miners. (Jeffrey W. Mantz:2)

The market for the material is huge. Last year, about 6.6 million pounds of tantalum was used around the world, 60 percent finding its way into the electronics industry, where it can be found in products like mobile phones, computers, game consoles and camcorders. The United States is believed to be the largest consumer of tantalum in the world, accounting for 40 percent of global demand.

In 2000, demand for tantalum capacitors exploded in tandem with the mobile phone and PC markets, causing a severe shortage. Tantalum ore prices shot up, with per-pound charges for refined powder climbing from less than \$50 to a peak of over \$400 at the end of last year. Today, with demand softening worldwide, prices have fallen to around \$100 a pound.

In response to the increased demand, coltan miners all over the world increased production. In the Congo region, both legitimate and rogue coltan merchants joined the rush. The boom brought in as much as \$20 million a month to rebel groups, as well as independent factions,

who were trading coltan mined mostly from northeastern Congo, according to the U.N. report. That money helps fuel the war.

The supply chain of coltan

Tracing the coltan supply chain through the Congo is no simple task. Ore originating in the Congo often passes through at least 10 hands before it winds up in a cell phone or a VCR. Coltan is circulated through elaborate international channels; in eastern border cities like Goma and Bukavu, it is bought by high level middlemen, frequently operating in collusion with local militias, who in turn typically sell to Belgian, South African, Rwandan, and other foreigners. Those intermediaries then sell to buyers in the United States, Japan and Europe who extract the tantalum powder from the ore and refine and process it. (Jeffrey W. Mantz:42)

How multinational react to accusations of using illegal coltan. (Kristi Essick 2001)

So far, high-tech companies have been reluctant to acknowledge they may be using materials originating from Congo rebels. That said, they could do little to prove they do not. The following are examples of reactions of corporations on the issue.

"We first heard about this in April and immediately asked our suppliers if they used tantalum from the Congo," said Outi Mikkonen, communications manager for environmental affairs at Nokia. "All you can do is ask and if they say no, we believe it." And so it continues down the line. Tantalum capacitor makers place their faith in their suppliers. One of Nokia's main suppliers, for example, is Kemet of Greenville, S.C., the world's largest tantalum capacitor maker. "We have gone back to our suppliers to ascertain that the material we are buying is not obtained illegally from the Congo," says Harris Crowley Jr., a senior VP.

But tantalum suppliers can offer little assurance to capacitor manufacturers that their product doesn't come courtesy of the Congo rebels. "I'm not in favor of killing gorillas," says Dick Rosen, CEO of AVX, a tantalum capacitor maker in Myrtle Beach, S.C. But "we don't have an idea where the metal comes from. There's no way to tell. I don't know how to control it," he says.

Epcos, a tantalum capacitor manufacturer in Munich supplying the mobile phone industry, is also quick to place the responsibility on its suppliers - which include Cabot and H.C. Starck, as well as smaller processors in Europe and Japan. Heinz Kahlert, a spokesman for Epcos,

pointed to a press release issued by H.C. Starck that states "we only purchase raw materials from established trading companies that have worked in various African countries for a long time and are headquartered in Europe or the United States." The press release goes on to claim: "These trading companies have confirmed that H.C. Starck is not being supplied with material from the crisis areas of central Africa."

At some point though, the wall of plausible deniability starts to break down. While H.C. Starck is adamant it is not being supplied with black-market coltan, one of its own suppliers, U.K.-based trading company A&M Minerals and Metals, is less sure.

A&M works mostly with Nigerian and Bolivian miners, but also buys up to 3 tons of tantalum-bearing ore a month from Uganda. "I couldn't tell you for 100 percent that this material from Uganda didn't come from the Congo," says managing director James McCombie. "It could have been smuggled across the border."

The company works with peasant producers and local traders, and McCombie admits that "once you get to that level, it is very difficult to check the provenance. It would be silly of us to try to pretend that we know the origin of every pound of coltan we get in our hands."

Then there's Brussels-based Sogem, another international trading company that sells the unrefined coltan it buys in the Congo and Rwanda to processing companies in the United States, Europe and Asia. It offers only a vague reassurance about the origins of the ore it resells. "We have been told that our money goes directly to the population," says Sogem spokeswoman Moniek Delvou. Sogem doesn't deal with rebel-backed traders and monopolies in the region, Delvou says. But she declines to name the mines and local trading companies that supply Sogem and admits she isn't 100 percent sure of the original source. "How can you be 100 percent sure of anything in life?" she asked.

Ericsson says it requires its suppliers to comply with company environmental, ethical and human-rights policies. "We are putting demands in place and will follow it up," says Mats Pellback-Scharp, environmental manager of consumer products. Meanwhile, Kemet says it will start requiring ore suppliers to certify that their tantalum does not come from the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi or Uganda. "If everybody takes a stance, maybe it will dry up," says Kemet's Crowley.

For its part, Intel has begun a review to determine the source of the tantalum it uses. "We'd like to be able to know the answer," says spokesman Chuck Mulloy. Compaq has issued a statement saying it "condemns the reported activities of illegal miners in the Democratic Republic of Congo." But, as spokesman Arch Currid says, "Most of the components that we get from third-party providers, so where they get their raw goods is hard to determine."

Hewlett-Packard officials also denounce the situation in the Congo and say the company intends to work with the Electronic Industries Alliance to ensure no tainted tantalum ends up in HP products.

Despite suggestions from different NGOs such as Global witness that mobile companies should at least publish their supply chains on their websites, companies such as Nokia have refused saying that there many other things to consider when one is taking these kind of actions. They worry more about their competitors and their profits than the impacts their business is having on human life in DRC. Asked what should be told to the children of DRC who hope that western companies will hear their crying and take measures, one Nokia representative said that "they should have hope, there is hope in the future". One can only wonder, what has been done since it has been known in 2001 that these companies are using minerals coming from the DRC which are contributing to the continuation of war. (Frank Piasecki Poulsen: Blood in the mobile)

Efforts from the international community

A lot of efforts have been made to unveil the conflict in DRC. The U.N. has condemned multinational corporations and countries involved in the conflict and called for "sanctions against countries and individuals involved in the illegal activities; sanctions against countries and individuals involved in the illegal activities; preventive measures to avoid a recurrence of the current situation; reparations to the victims of the illegal exploitation of natural resources; design of a framework for reconstruction; improvement of international mechanisms and regulations governing some natural resources; and security issues."(UN report 2001:5). Since 2001, an Expert Panel of the United Nations Security Council has published four reports since 2001 on the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the DRC. The third report, in October 2002, clearly states that the private sector must accept some responsibility for contributing to this resource-based conflict through the purchase of illegally mined material – the spoils of war. (Karen Hayes & Richard Burge: 13)

The Oxfam report in 2001 highlighted that the “humanitarian consequences of the war in the DRC are horrendous and the humanitarian assistance provided by the international community has been totally inadequate when considered alongside the scale of human suffering, and when compared with the efforts made to address humanitarian crises in other regions of the world.

A large proportion of humanitarian need in the country is not being met, and thousands of people who require assistance remain inaccessible. (Oxfam report 2001:4)

Amnesty International reported that in one incident, in April 2001, 50 or more people, including a six-year-old child, were reportedly killed when a hillside collapsed into a coltan mine controlled by the Rwandese army at Mumba, in Masisi territory, North-Kivu. According to Amnesty International, none of the victims or their families has been compensated. Conditions in the mine were not improved and in July 2001 the Rwandese army reportedly forced the miners to increase production by working night and day. (AI report 2001:36)

Does the World Care?

“I am convinced now ... that the lives of Congolese people no longer mean anything to anybody. Not to those who kill us like flies, our brothers who help kill us or those you call the international community.... Even God does not listen to our prayers anymore and abandons us.” (Amnesty International report 2001:3)

Oxfam criticized the international community in their 2000 report for still ignoring the DRC. When comparing with the response in Kosovo, they pointed out that “in 1999, donor governments gave just \$8 per person in the DRC, while providing \$207 per person in response to the UN appeal for the former Yugoslavia. While it is clear that both regions have significant needs, there is little commitment to *universal* entitlement to humanitarian assistance.” (Oxfam report 2001)

Oxfam also noted that “the international community is essentially ignoring what has been deemed ‘Africa’s first world war.’ The DRC remains a forgotten emergency. Falling outside of the media spotlight, and experiencing persistent shortfalls in pledged humanitarian aid, the population of the DRC has been largely abandoned to struggle for their own survival.” (Oxfam report 2001)

Conclusion

The conflict minerals problem is complicated and the suffering of DRC and its people is immense. The main players are multinational corporations who, knowingly or not, are financing the continuation of the conflict. However, these multinational corporations don't operate on their own – they have indigenous collaborators who make it difficult to organize an international embargo. Just as the successful sanctions on the South African apartheid regime were aided by a powerful African-American community for whom the link was made with the American civil rights movement, a significant group could be organized around the coltan issue in the DRC.

There is still hope because we as electronics consumers are directly involved in the conflict thus we can certainly play a critical role in ending it. We must raise our collective voice as consumers and demand conflict-free electronics from these corporations. By pressuring electronics companies to remove conflict minerals from their supply chains and demanding for higher standards, we can help remove fuel from the fire in DRC thus saving lives of millions of innocent people from exploited labor, rape and death. It is up to us to stop it because multinational corporations are not willing to give up on the huge interests they are gaining from the DRC minerals. We as consumers should take the lead to create a movement for action in DRC.

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