

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is home to 75 million people. It is the second largest country in Africa by area and the nineteenth most populous nation in the world. The country has also been referred to as the Saudi Arabia of minerals and is home to the world's deadliest conflict since the World War II. The root of this conflict is Gold and other valuable minerals like Coltan and Cassiterite.

The conflict and resulting humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has taken the lives of 5.4 million people since 1998 and continues to leave as many as 45,000 dead every month. The secondary aspects of the conflict, such as starvation and disease, cause the majority of these deaths.

Coltan is short for columbite-tantalite - a black tar-like mineral found in major quantities in the DR Congo. The DR Congo possesses 80 percent of the world's coltan, but only mines a fraction of it. When coltan is refined it becomes a heat resistant powder that can hold a high electric charge. It's a vital component in a vast array of small electronic devices, especially in mobile phones, laptop computers, pagers, and other electronic devices.

Cassiterite has been the chief tin ore throughout ancient history and remains the most important source of tin today. Tin has many uses. It takes a high polish and is used to coat other metals to prevent corrosion, such as in tin cans; which are made of tin-coated steel. Alloys of tin are important, such as soft solder and bronze.

Gold - The world consumption of new gold produced is about 50% in jewelry, 40% in investments, and 10% in industry.

Despite promises by President Kabila to clean up the mining industry, corruption remains rife and thousands of small-scale unofficial mines scatter the country.

It's no coincidence that the mineral mines are situated in the areas home to the bloodiest violence and conflict. The mines are either controlled by government troops (FARDC) or the rebels they're fighting (principally the FDLR and M23), though they all deny any involvement. The mines and the communities around them are controlled with an iron fist and conditions for the men and children who serve as the miners and porters are extremely tough.

Most miners only barely earn enough to survive, between \$1 and \$2 a day. Many don't even manage that. Few if any of the mines are large-scale industrial ones owned by international companies. They are hand-built artisan mines, with the only tools available being shovels and a lot of hard labor. The method dates back more than 2000 years, miners lay blankets in the water ways and let the sediment collect in the fibers, the blankets are then wrung out into a pan, mercury is added to the sediment which chemically binds the gold together, the mercury is later burnt away leaving a solid ball of unpurified gold.

Though the price on the world commodity markets of its vast gold, coltan and cassiterite has reached record highs in recent years, the DR Congo's economy and its population haven't benefited in the slightest. One of the richest countries on the planet in terms of natural resources, DR Congo remains one of the very poorest by most economic standards.

The mineral trade is a valuable source of income for government soldiers and rebels alike - they often don't receive any salary. But it's only the people right at the top of the hierarchy - the warlords and army commanders - that are really making any money. And that money is usually used to buy more weapons and ammunition to maintain their control of the territory and population. And so the cycle of violence continues.

Gold is now the most important conflict mineral in eastern DR Congo, with at least 12 tons worth roughly \$500 million smuggled out of the east every year. The M23 rebel group has taken over a profitable part of the conflict gold trade in the east of the DR Congo...It is using revenues from the illicit trade to benefit its leaders and supporters and fund its military campaign by building military alliances and networks with other armed groups that control territory around gold mines and by smuggling gold through Uganda and Burundi.

The other widespread rebel group is known as the Mai-Mai. The term Mai-Mai refers to any kind of community-based militia group active in the DR Congo, formed to defend their local territory against other armed groups. They are often made up of child soldiers that fall under the command of the local warlord. Territory is contested between militia's aiming to gain control over mines and the populations that mine them.



For more than two decades, the DR Congo has struggled with ongoing conflict in its eastern provinces. Today, an estimated 2.6 million Congolese are internally displaced, and more than 460,000 have fled their homes into neighboring countries. Armed groups such as the M23, FDLR, and the Mai-Mai threaten civilians in North Kivu, South Kivu, Katanga, and Orientale provinces. Increasingly, regional

dynamics have also contributed to instability that extends beyond the DRC's borders. While local government officials, UN agencies, and NGOs are striving to mitigate the suffering of the displaced, the level of violence and insecurity has in many cases prevented significant improvements from being made.



May 2014 - In north Kivu province, a Mai-Mai militiaman mans his post protecting the gold rich area under their control from other invading militia groups.



Dec 2013 - Muhungu Solo, a 14-year-old member of the Mai-Mai out on night patrol near his checkpoint where they take bribes from any who wishes to pass. Muhungu has been in the militia for a few years, he has never been to school all he known is his Chinese made heavy machinegun.



Apr 2013 - Prisoners of the Bukavu central prison enjoy cigarettes a rare commodity, which reveals those with connections or muscle.