

Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: Combating the repercussions of the past and current exploitation of Congo and its resources

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Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country well known for its abundance of natural resources such as diamond, gold, copper, cobalt, coltan, uranium, timber, and oil. Although DRC acquires a great advantage, its citizens incessantly fail to benefit from such natural wealth due to the continuous foreign interventions and unceasing ethnic conflicts. The Exploitation of Congo and its resources can be dated back as early as 1480s when the Portuguese traders arrived, and over the course of half a millennium, a myriad of events such as Belgian occupation, civil war, Congo war, and blood Tantalum has contributed to the suffering of millions of Congolese.

Terms & Definition

-Exploitation: the action of treating someone or a country unfairly for personal benefits.

-Tantalum: tantalum is a metal extracted from columbite tantalite and it is widely used for the manufacture of electronic devices. Tantalum is also well known for being one of the “conflict minerals”.

-RPF: RPF is short for Rwandan Patriotic Front and it is dominated by the Tutsis. RPF is responsible for initiating the First and Second Congo War.

-Hutu and Tutsis: Hutu and Tutsis were the two main ethnic groups in Rwanda. They fought against each other in the Rwanda Genocide and the conflicts between these two groups have also contributed to the Congo War.

- Genocide: deliberate large killing of a particular ethnic group. The Rwanda Genocide in 1994 eventually led to the Congo War.

-Imperialism: extending a country's power and sphere of influence through diplomacy or military force.

-Annex: adding territory to one's own territory by appropriation

Background

The exploitation of Congo started in 1480s when the Portuguese traders reached the Kingdom of Kongo. The Portuguese were amazed by Congo's natural wealth and in order to obtain these resources, they exterminated any local political forces capable of standing against slaving and trading interest. The Portuguese also gave economic and military support to rebels so that they can overthrow the government. In short amount of time, the Kongolese army was destroyed, Kings were murdered, and high rank officials were assassinated.

By 1600s, Congo finally enters a state of anarchy. Simultaneously, the British invades Congo and becomes prosperous by exploiting Congo's resources as well as enslaving native people.

Exploitation of Congo and its resources continue in the 19th century due to the bicycle craze. Bicycles, which were first made in Germany in 1817 then developed in France during the 1860s, were one of the earliest means of transportation. Soon, bicycles became extremely popular amongst the middle class in Europe and North America. In order to ensure that the bicycle industry was operating at maximum capacity, Congolese men were forced to go into jungle and harvest rubber, which were used to make wheels.

Congo was too weak to stand up against the European powers. Even the slightest resistance was met with immediate punishment and those who were seen as capable of resisting were executed. Moreover, under the influence of European powers, Congolese had no access to proper education.

Exploitation of Congo became severe especially in 1908 when Belgium annexed Congo. After the Berlin Conference in 1884, King Leopold II of Belgium asserted his full powers on Congo. Eventually on 18th of October 1908, the Belgian parliament voted in favour to annex Congo. During the period in which Belgium had full controls of Congo, Congo suffered from unfair economic policy, slavery, and unreasonably high rubber production quotas.

During the two World Wars, Congo was brutalized by many world powers. In WW1, 75% of copper in Congo was utilized to make the brass casing of allied shells fired at Passchendaele and Somme. In WW2, Congolese men were forced to mine uranium in order to make atomic bombs, which were later dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Rather than using its resources for the benefits of their own people, Congo was forced to use a large proportion of their resources to help the allies in the war.

In 1960, Congo was finally able to achieve independence due to a widespread nationalist movement led by Patrice Lumumba. On 30th of June 1960, the Democratic Republic of Congo was officially established and Lumumba became the first president of Congo. Hopes were high for the new government however; Congo soon faced a political struggle. Patrice Lumumba was arrested and executed by Western backed rebels. In the

mean time, Joseph Desire Mobutu sparked a mutiny and took over Congo. After seizing the government, in 1971, Mobutu changed Congo's name from the 'Democratic Republic of Congo' to the 'Republic of Zaire'. The Western powers tolerated Mobutu's government as long as minerals flowed and as long as Congo stayed out of the Soviet's sphere of influence.

The Rwandan genocide in 1994 has led to the First and Second Congo war in which millions of Congolese have died and suffered. In 1994, tension grew between two major groups, Hutu and Tutsi, in Rwanda. At that time, the Hutus dominated the Rwandan government and Tutsis were dissatisfied with the difference in the treatment of the two ethnic groups; generally, Hutus were regarded as the elites. In order to settle down uprisings led by Tutsis, Hutu power groups carried out mass killing of Tutsis. The Tutsis retaliated by forming the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) and overthrew the Hutu government. Due to the sudden change in government, the Hutus had to flee Rwanda in fear of persecution. Mobutu, the leader of Zaire, was pro-Hutu and therefore had allowed Hutu genocidaires to stay in Congo. In order to exterminate the Hutu genocidaires, RPF formed alliance with other African countries such as Uganda and invaded Congo in 1996. Since Mobutu's army was very corrupt, Mobutu was easily defeated and RPF appointed Kabila as the new president in September 1997.

The Second Congo War started in August 1998. Kabila refused to follow Rwanda's orders and allowed Hutus to regroup in Eastern Congo. As a result, Rwanda and Uganda joined forces again and invaded Congo in August. However, this time, neighboring countries such as Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe came to Kabila's rescue and stopped Rwanda's invasion temporarily. The war continued on for years and finally came to a stop when Joseph Kabila signed the Global and all-inclusive agreement in South Africa in 2003. Although the war has stopped, 3.8 million deaths were recorded.

Major Parties involved

Europe

- European powers were one of the very first to land on Congo and discover its cast resources. European countries such as Portugal and Britain exploited Congo by shipping resources into their own countries and forcing thousands of Congolese to become slaves.

Belgium

- Belgium is a European country that had the most influence on Congo. Between the years 1908 to 1960, Belgium had full control over Congo and Congo was known as "Belgian Congo"

USA

- USA exploited Congo and its natural resources during the two world wars. US has also backed Rwanda and Uganda's invasion of Congo in 1996. Furthermore, the US is responsible for helping Mobutu overthrow Lumumba's government.

UN

- The United Nations deployed the world's largest peacekeeping force of 17000 men to help solve conflict in Congo and regularly monitor the situation.

Rwanda/ RPF

- Rwanda is responsible for the first and second Congo war. The RPF has invaded Congo twice in order to exterminate Hutu power groups.

Previous Attempt

Attempts to solve the matter of conflict minerals in Congo are not new. Previously proposed solutions included sanctions to the countries to disclose the origins of minerals. Such sanctions include the Dodd-Frank reform, which was proposed in 2010 by Barack Obama. The reform obligated companies to reveal the origins of minerals such as coltan, cassiterite, wolframite, or gold used in the production of goods. However, the reform received much criticism due to the fact that it did not answer to the root of the problem.

Possible solutions

Although there is no direct solution to solving the problems in Congo, if the Congolese and regional governments, the international community, and the private sector can align their efforts on the common goal of a revitalized legitimate mineral trade in eastern Congo, it would have a major impact in resolving the conflict.

Transparency is the first step toward altering the conflict economy in Congo. The ability of end users to trace and audit the supply chains for the metal components in their electronics products is a critical step to channeling international demand away from armed groups and toward legitimate sources. This can be one of the possible solutions that can be implemented to better the situation in Congo.

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