

The illegal exploitation of natural resources and war in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is located in the heart of equatorial central Africa and has an area of over two million square kilometres. The current population is estimated at 50 million. The country has a unique biodiversity, large mineral and forest resources and rich soils good for agriculture.

The DRC is also the most mineral rich country in Africa holding the world's biggest copper, cobalt and cadmium deposits; it also holds large quantities of gold and diamonds.

In 1994 disruption occurred in the east of DRC with a refugee crisis which was a result of the war in neighbouring Rwanda.

In August 1998, fighting erupted between the DRC army and Rwandan and Ugandan troops: Uganda and Rwanda neighbour DRC to the East. Other neighbouring countries or countries near by also became involved: Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia sent their armies to support the Congo government. Burundi also became involved and joined forces against DRC.

The conflict has become mainly about the access to, control of and trade in five key mineral resources: gold, timber, diamonds, cobalt and copper. DRC also has quantities of another rare metallic ore: coltan. This is important for the manufacture of mobile phones.

A recent United Nations (UN) report on DRC said that rebels and foreign governments plundered the country's resources during the occupation of the country. The report says that the war in DRC has been fuelled by different groups competing for access to gold, diamonds and other mineral resources.

The looting for these resources has helped fuel a four-year war in which 2.5 million people have died and 2.3 million have had to leave their homes.

As well as having to flee the fighting, local people also suffer because they receive no benefit from the theft of precious minerals from their home areas.



Poached ivory

The UN report says that national wildlife parks, particularly those in the east of the country, are being damaged by illegal mining, poaching and hunting for game meat and ivory. These practices destroy important ecological sites and will eventually deprive local people of income they could earn from tourism when peace eventually returns to the region.

According to the UN's report, the scramble for DRC's resources has become the main reason for fighting between different groups.



Tens of thousands of people have fled their homes because of conflict in DRC

Web links for further information:

BBC Country Profiles: DRC

A brief history and key statistics: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1076399.stm

BBC reports on how resources, and gold in particular, is fueling conflict in the Congo:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4604627.stm>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4601213.stm>

BBC News World Edition

Top news stories from across Africa <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/default.stm>

All Africa

A site offering news from over one hundred newspapers and news agencies across Africa. Congo pages:

http://allafrica.com/congo_brazzaville/

http://allafrica.com/congo_kinshasa/

One World Africa

The African arm of the One World independent media network; a network of people and groups working for human rights and sustainable development.

<http://africa.oneworld.net/article/frontpage/151/509>

UNDP Human Development Reports

Human development indicators, searchable by country or indicators.

<http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/>