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# Greed and Cynicism Fuel Rwanda's War in DRC



People displaced by the fighting in Goma flee the city. Credit: WFP/Moses Sawasawa

On January 28, addressing the UN Security Council from Goma, Vivian van de Perre, Deputy Head of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC ([MONUSCO](#)), provided a detailed briefing, highlighting the dire humanitarian situation and the need for “urgent and coordinated international action” to stop the fighting between Rwanda-backed M23 rebels and Congolese forces – as they battle for control of the city.

She reported that the recent clashes have led to massive displacement, with over 178,000 people fleeing Kalehe territory after the M23 took control of Minova. More than 34,000 of those on the run have sought refuge in already overcrowded IDP sites in and around Goma, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and overwhelming the city's infrastructure.

OAKLAND, California, USA, Jan 30 2025 (IPS) - The fresh offensive by the M23 rebels and Rwanda forces in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) coincides with the first anniversary of the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) signed between the European Union (EU) and Rwanda to cooperate on the supply of “critical minerals.”

The agreement could not be more appalling given its total disregard of Rwanda's role in driving the violent conflict raging in Eastern DRC for the last thirty years, either directly through its own forces, or by supporting armed groups to fight on its behalf. The consequence has been deaths of millions, along with massive displacement and immense suffering for the Congolese.

President Paul Kagame of Rwanda justifies the war, citing concerns for peace and security for the Tutsi ethnic group, target of the 1994 genocide. It is, however, Rwanda's illicit extraction of eastern Congo's highly lucrative minerals including gold and the world's largest reserves of cobalt (used in batteries) and coltan (used in modern technological devices), that is fueling this devastation.

Rwanda's support of the rebel group M23 has allowed it to take over much of eastern Congo, capture many mines, and perpetrate massacres and egregious human rights abuses.



Internally displaced persons (IDP) in the camp in Roe, in the territory of Djugu, February 2022.  
Credit: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

While it is wrong and immoral for the EU to strike a deal with a country responsible for so much suffering, the very terms of the February 2024 agreement make it worse as they overlook the role of Rwanda in illicit extraction.

Over the past decade, Rwanda has exported far higher quantities of coltan than its own mines produce. It is [estimated](#) that up to 90 percent of Rwanda's coltan exports are illegally sourced from eastern DRC, through what the NGO Global Witness has dubbed as a massive "[laundromat](#)."

Yet, the European bureaucrats who worded the agreement stated that "[Rwanda] is a major player on the world's tantalum extraction. It also produces tin, tungsten, gold and niobium, and has potential for lithium and rare earth elements.

In addition, Rwanda with its favorable investment climate and rule of law can become a hub for value addition in the mineral sector. One gold refinery already exists, while a tantalum refinery will soon be operational."

The EU – like the US – has [legislation](#) in place that is supposed to prevent the use of conflict minerals from DRC but the MOU's more than favorable terms to describe Rwanda and its business climate suggest a deliberate choice not to enforce European laws despite the country's well documented egregious records.

Losing hope with Western regulators, last month, DRC filed [criminal complaints](#) against subsidiaries of Apple in France and Belgium, accusing the tech firm of using [conflict minerals](#) in its supply chain. Lawyers for the DRC government [claim](#) that Apple is responsible for "covering up war crimes and the laundering of tainted minerals, handling stolen goods, and carrying out deceptive commercial practices to assure consumers supply chains are clean."

This complaint speaks to the blatant failure of the traceability schemes that have supposedly been put in place to address the issue of "conflict minerals." Since 2010, the [International Tin Supply Chain Initiative](#) is supposed to ensure upstream traceability in the African Great Lakes Region. It

operates at over 2,000 mines and has been endorsed by the Responsible Minerals Initiative and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Unfortunately, instead of restricting the entry of conflict minerals into global supply chains, the scheme has been used to [illegally launder conflict-minerals](#) from DRC or smuggled into neighboring countries. This has allowed illegally tagged minerals to ultimately end up in the products of brands such as [Apple, Intel, Samsung, Nokia, Motorola, and Tesla](#).

The horrors unleashed due to conflict minerals in Eastern DRC are well known to governments, corporations and their shareholders. For years, the United Nations has sounded the alarm over Rwanda's continued assistance to the M23, documenting the direct involvement of its armed forces in the conflict and the supply of [weapons and ammunitions](#) to the rebels.

Yet, Western countries remain long-time supporters. From 2001 to 2022, the US alone [provided](#) over US\$3.9 billion in economic aid to Rwanda and waited until October 2023 to place Rwanda on a blacklist for military aid for violating the Child Soldiers Prevention Act due to Rwandan support for M23, which recruits child soldiers.

The UK has been [hesitant](#) to criticize Rwanda, let alone cut off military aid, as it was negotiating a migrant deportation pact with the country. While France and the EU have publicly denounced Rwanda, neither have cut off [military aid](#), and continue cooperation as demonstrated by the critical minerals deal.

In a March 2023 press conference with President Tshisekedi, when asked if France would pursue sanctions against Rwanda, President Macron's [response](#) blamed the Congolese government for country's instability.

In addition to the violence, the on-going war and exploitation of DRC's mineral resources has a dire impact on the country's economy, draining its financial resources and preventing revenue from mineral extraction to reach its coffers. Poverty and hunger are widespread whereas access to basic services such as health and education are greatly underfunded.

The situation of countries not benefiting economically from their own natural resources has been labelled as a "[resource curse](#)." However, looking at the forces driving and profiteering from the exploitation and violence, it is not the curse but rather the greed and cynical attitude of governments and corporate actors that is responsible.

On January 25, 2025, the EU [said](#) that "Rwanda must cease its support for the M23 and withdraw," and warned that it "will consider all the tools at its disposal in order to hold accountable those responsible for sustaining armed conflict, instability and insecurity in the DRC." Sanctions on Rwanda are obviously long overdue.

An easy first step for European countries will be to end the agreement that should have never been signed in the first place. The next step must be enforcement of conflict minerals regulations and laws they have conveniently failed to apply so far.

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