



9 Things You Need To Know About Conflict Minerals

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The armed conflict in eastern Congo that has killed over 5.4 million people is financed largely by trading minerals used in an array of common consumer products around the world, from electronics to jewelry. Recent critiques by the [Cato Institute](#) and in the [Washington Post](#) have questioned whether current local and international initiatives to combat the problem are causing more harm than good. Last month, the Enough Project's U.S. and Congo-based teams visited mining communities in eastern Congo to get an updated assessment on conflict minerals.

To better understand the debate and what is at stake, here are nine things you need to know about conflict minerals today:

1. Conflict minerals reforms and military pressure are reducing the power of armed groups.

Conflict minerals reforms have made it less profitable for armed groups to mine tin, tungsten, and tantalum (the "3T" minerals), and military operations also have had a major impact on them. Several of the most significant armed groups that were also involved in the conflict minerals trade have decreased significantly in size or have disappeared. In contrast to the situation over the past two decades, there is no longer a major Rwanda-backed militia in eastern Congo. Another major threat, the FDLR armed group, is now [one-quarter of its size](#) from five years ago. Several other militias such as Nyatura and Mai Mai Morgan are severely weakened. But this is a long-term process, and the war is not completely over. Other [remaining armed groups](#) must be the targets of peace-building efforts.

2. Conflict gold is still a problem.

Congo's artisanally-mined gold continues to drive violence against civilians. While security at 3T mines is improving, armed groups are still illegally mining and smuggling millions of dollars' worth of gold. Once again, the global markets that accept that gold are complicit. Both ends of the pipeline need to be addressed. Artisanal gold miners should have access to a formal market that would improve working conditions and help prevent their exploitation. On the other side of the pipeline, companies that use gold in their products can play a positive role by cleaning up their supply chains and supporting a legal, peaceful gold trade in Congo. [Some jewelry companies](#) have begun to take positive action by sourcing conflict-free gold and contributing to livelihood projects.

3. Conflict minerals have been a primary source of revenue for armed groups in eastern Congo since the late 1990s.

As the Archbishop of Bukavu François-Xavier Maroy Rusengo told our team, “War is planned by people who want to get a hold of this wealth. There is a correlation between minerals and rape. Most places that are home to mines are where the assaults on women have been most dramatic.” Over the past 15 years, numerous United Nations expert reports and Congolese think tank studies have documented that minerals were “[the engine of the conflict](#),” and “[the principal method used by FDLR \[rebel group\] to raise funds](#).” In 2008, armed groups were estimated to have [earned \\$185 million from the conflict minerals trade](#).

4. The U.S. Dodd-Frank Act contains minerals reforms that many Congolese organizations and human rights defenders support.

That law requires companies to publicly reveal if their products might contain conflict minerals from Africa’s Great Lakes region. Sakharov Prize winner and Nobel Prize nominee [Dr. Denis Mukwege](#) and Bukavu [Archbishop Rusengo](#) recently called on the European Union to replicate Dodd-Frank’s corporate responsibility requirements. Recently, both [Congolese and international experts](#) and [Congolese civil society groups](#) have publicly called for policymakers to reinforce Dodd-Frank with further reforms. Dodd Frank is not a panacea and other Congolese groups have raised concerns, which must be addressed by additional mining and governance reforms.

5. Conflict minerals reforms are helping make life safer for thousands of miners and many mining communities.

Today, three-quarters of miners working at 3T mines in eastern Congo [no longer work under threat of armed groups](#). Before Dodd-Frank passed in 2010, the [UN Group of Experts](#) reported, “In the Kivu provinces, almost every mining deposit [was] controlled by a military group.”

6. While safer, many miners have lost income in the short-term because the reforms to certify clean mines have been too slow.

Miners still face harsh conditions, especially gold miners. These mining communities must be assisted. The E.U., the World Bank, USAID, governments, and companies should support [robust livelihood programs](#) to support mining communities, [road-building, increased conflict-free certification, and further mining reforms](#).

7. Conflict minerals are not the whole story. Addressing conflict minerals alone will not end the conflict in Congo.

An interconnected web of issues are driving Congo’s armed conflict, including impunity for war crimes, corruption, and interference by Congo’s neighbors. A broad coalition of local and international advocacy partners is engaged in a [comprehensive strategy](#) to help end the war, including [regional democratization and mining reforms](#), the responsible development of roads

and infrastructure, disarmament and reintegration programs, and targeted measures against armed groups.

8. Corporations must be held accountable for their supply chains.

Dodd-Frank's conflict minerals regulations are the only mandatory mechanism for such accountability. Corporations are the end-users of Congo's minerals. The Dodd-Frank disclosure law requires corporations to have more transparent supply chains. Without this, companies would again be free to source minerals opaquely from some of the worst war zones with no mechanism for public accountability. Because of the law, companies have set up rigorous conflict-free auditing programs, and approximately [half of the world's smelters are now conflict-free](#).

9. "Conflict-free" should mean more than the absence of armed groups.

Historically, corporate interests in Congo have led to exploitation and environmental degradation. Criminal and destructive behavior by corporations in Congo is not acceptable. The [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) recognize the links between business practices and human rights impact, and provide protocols for companies to undertake impact assessments of their activities on local populations. [Any investment](#) and sourcing must meet international standards related to human rights, community engagement, due diligence, and the environment.

The trade in conflict minerals is an illegal market that kills. Critiques of the implementation of Dodd-Frank regulations, corporate due diligence, and other global and local efforts to combat this trade should be used to improve those initiatives – not abandon them.