



The Conflict-Free Campus Initiative

Make your Campus Conflict-Free

The Conflict-Free Campus Initiative is a nation-wide campaign to build the consumer voice for conflict-free electronics – cell phones, laptops, and other devices that do not finance war in eastern Congo. It draws on the power of student leadership and activism to encourage university officials and stakeholders to commit to measures that pressure electronics companies to take responsibility for the minerals in their supply chains, which have been contributing to the ongoing conflict in eastern Congo. **By raising our collective voice as consumers, we can actually bring about a shift in corporate and government policy and help bring peace to Congo.**

THE ISSUE: Conflict has engulfed eastern Congo for over a decade in a silent war. According to the International Rescue Committee, the conflict has already claimed the lives of over 5 million civilians and is estimated to have a mortality rate of 45 thousand per month resulting from famine, preventable disease, displacement, killings, and sexual violence.

The root causes of Congo's conflict include long standing ethnic tensions, a Congolese state absent in protecting its own citizens, and the proliferation of numerous armed militia groups who target civilian populations in remote regions where rule of law is weak. One particularly important driver of the ongoing conflict lies in the economic incentive fueled by a multi-million dollar trade in conflict minerals - four to be exact: tin, tungsten, tantalum, or the 3Ts, and gold that are found in almost every consumer electronics product.

Armed groups earn hundreds of millions of dollars per year by trading these four minerals. This money enables the militias to purchase large numbers of weapons and continue their campaign of brutal violence against civilians, with some of the worst abuses occurring in mining areas - including the systematic use of rape and torture to destroy the social fabric of communities. The majority of these minerals eventually wind up in electronic devices such as cell phones, portable music players, and computers. This means that the very devices which have become central to our communication, business infrastructure and social engagement could also be fueling a conflict that is still claiming the lives of thousands as we speak.

THE PATHWAY TO PEACE: Sustainable peace in eastern Congo can only be realized through a multi-dimensional response from international, regional and national actors. There are a range of complex issues at play, and the path to peace must include comprehensive security sector reform, resettlement of refugees and internally displaced civilians, the dismantling of rebel groups, and accountability for perpetrators. However, none of these long term strategies can be feasible or meaningful without removing the economic incentives to wage war.

A certification scheme that eliminates the market for conflict minerals and formalizes the mining sector in eastern Congo is essential. As the illicit trade becomes less profitable, peace becomes a more attractive paradigm. This shift of government and international economic policy opens the space for essential reforms including accountability for state and non-state actors involved in the conflict.

In recent history, we have seen precedence for the implementation of mining certification regimes. A decade ago, wars in Sierra Leone, Angola, and Liberia were being fueled by the illegal trade in blood diamonds. With a comprehensive response by the international community which included setting up a certification system, the conflict diamond trade was significantly reduced and these countries now experience a degree of peace and stability as a result. The obvious parallel to the conflict minerals campaign is that when key stakeholders come together to address the causes of violence instead of just treating the symptoms, that peace is possible to achieve.

By creating a system to trace, audit, and certify their products as conflict free, companies will contribute to choking off funds in their supply chain that find their way to armed groups and military units in Congo. This will not only reduce the resources available to these groups, who are among the worst human rights violators in the conflict, it will also create an incentive for minerals traders to reform their business practices and contribute to a more legitimate trade, one that would deliver more benefits to the Congolese people.

RECENTLY PASSED LEGISLATION LENDS US LEGITIMACY: The recent passage of provisions on conflict minerals from eastern Congo in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform act has brought unprecedented attention to the linkages between trade in minerals crucial to consumer electronics products and the ongoing conflict in DRC.

The new provision requires companies who report to the Securities and Exchanges Commission, or SEC, and manufacture products that contain the 3Ts and gold to trace and disclose whether these minerals originated in Congo or a neighboring country. If a company finds that minerals used in their products do originate in Congo or one of its neighboring countries they then must report on the measures they have taken to exercise due diligence on ensuring their supply chain does not either directly or indirectly fund armed groups controlling mines in eastern Congo.

Until now, companies have relied upon assurances from their suppliers that they do not purchase conflict minerals, without independent verification. With this law, the burden of proof shifts: now companies must find out where their suppliers actually source from. Most importantly, companies need to provide independent verification of these steps through an independent private sector audit of their reporting.

Congress has taken a first step, but we have a long way to go toward ending the illicit conflict minerals trade in Congo. Specifically, this legislation currently only requires companies to trace and audit their supply chains, but does not establish either a certification requirement or penalties for companies who source from conflict areas. Given the negative publicity likely to accompany any public reporting of conflict minerals supply chains, one route for companies to take is to simply not source from the Congo or its neighbors at all. While this embargo may help clean up supply chains in the short term, it won't solve the problem in the long term. Minerals smuggled out of the Congo are smelted with non-conflict minerals which mean that without a

certification scheme in place there is simply no guarantee of our products being conflict-free. Furthermore, Congo is home to a substantial supply of the world's tin, tungsten and tantalum, which means that eventually the need for these minerals will reemerge and our supply chains will be tainted once more.

STUDENT LEADERS ARE ALREADY PAVING THE WAY: The movement to end the violence in eastern Congo begs for the same leadership that student activists demonstrated through their divestment campaigns addressing the genocide in Darfur.

In Spring 2010, thanks to the activism of STAND and student leaders, Stanford University took the lead in raising the voice of academic institutions speaking out against the conflict in Congo by passing a resolution that commits their full support to corporate or shareholder led measures that would result in consumer electronics becoming conflict-free products.

Given the status of universities and colleges as thought leaders, corporate account holders, investors and educators, Stanford's voice as an institution acknowledging and publicly committing to the principle of conflict-free products has been a powerful and influential one. Stanford's move is precisely the type of initial action that will help push for a system to trace, audit, and certify companies' supply chains to guarantee conflict-free products. No doubt Stanford's actions also helped pressure Congress to act as well.

YOUR VOICE: While comprehensive action by the US Government and other international actors to address the conflict in eastern Congo will be essential to long term stability, it is critically important to focus our voice and use those levers which will contribute most immediately to end the violence.

The direct link between war in Congo and the electronics we use every day gives us enormous power as consumers to demand change. By encouraging your university to publicly support the conflict-free movement, you will not only send a message that you as an individual consumer demand that your electronics products are conflict-free but also demonstrate that demand through a collective, institutional voice. Universities are also a large client for most electronics companies and represent a large section of the buyers market for consumer electronics. Additionally, the campaign will reach the influential decision makers who sit on the boards of universities and colleges across the country - many of whom have relationships and significant investments in these companies.

We all use computers, cell phones, and other consumer electronics. This campaign is not about boycotting electronics, but about using that very technology and consumer purchasing power to demand conflict-free products and take away the fuel for some of the worst violence in the world in the process.

Since we are the end consumers of Congo's tin, tungsten, tantalum, and gold, we can demand for our products to be certified conflict-free and that is leverage worth using.