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Rich Land, Poor People: Unravelling the DRC Crisis and The M23 Rebellion

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“The wealth of the world was built on the backs of the exploited.”

– Walter Rodney.¹

The Congo crisis, often called the Worst Humanitarian crisis since the Holocaust, has persisted through decades of ethnic conflicts, political instability, and foreign involvement. The March 23 Rebellion spikes a new angle in this ongoing turmoil, with the rebels having captured the hub of Walikale and several other towns in North Kivu, Goma, and Bukavu as of March 2025.² This prompts a question of motive- is this a race for Congolese resources or part of a larger geopolitical struggle? As this crucial question is being addressed, this paper will also unravel the involvement of several foreign entities from Rwanda and Uganda, as well as China and the United States, and their stakes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)’s turmoil. This paper suggests that sometimes the root of all conflicts goes deeper than a mere race for resources. This paper, therefore, examines the economic structures that sustain war economies, questioning why the DRC remains impoverished and unstable despite its abundant natural resources.

¹ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications 1972)

² ‘M23 rebels capture strategic mining hub of Walikale in eastern DRC’ *The Guardian* (20 March 2025)

<<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/20/m23-rebels-capture-walikale-another-key-town-in-eastern-dr-congo>> accessed 24 March 2025

This paper also explores the intricate web of colonial legacies, resource exploitation, and proxy warfare that perpetuate regional instability, with a specific focus on the M23 rebellion as a case study. Since January 2025, at least 7,000 people have been killed, and approximately 600,000 individuals have been displaced due to intensified fighting in eastern DRC.³ A qualitative research methodology shall be employed to gain an understanding of the conflict through a review of primary and secondary sources. The paper concludes by exploring potential solutions, from regional cooperation and internal governance reforms to international policies that could help the DRC escape the so-called resource curse. As warmongers flourish and civilians bear the brunt of violence, the DRC remains the personification of human greed and how far nations, corporations, and rebellious factions travel in pursuit of power and wealth- a compelling narrative this paper seeks to analyse.

Keywords: *Congo crisis, M23 rebellion, war economies, resource curse.*

INTRODUCTION

The energy industry is a vital part of modern economies, just like capital, labour, and land.

“When I was a boy, we didn’t wake up with Vietnam and have Cyprus for lunch and the Congo for dinner.”

- Lyndon B. Johnson.⁴

For decades, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been in a frequently sidelined conflict where peace has yet to see the light of day. While the world is concerned about other major wars and conflicts, the situation in the DRC has been majorly overlooked despite being one of the most brutal and prolonged conflicts in history. Recently, the conflict gained some attention after the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels started advancing towards major cities like Goma in January 2025. As the reasons behind this sudden takeover become clear, certain geopolitical moves that have led Kinshasa to sever its ties with Kigali may also be considered. These developments have increased the stakes in this already sensitive region, deepening the humanitarian crises with the addition of a few more players.

³ ‘M23 rebels pull out of peace talks with Congo after EU sanctions’ *Reuters* (17 March 2025) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-m23-rebels-say-they-will-send-delegation-angola-peace-talks-2025-03-17>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁴ *Ibid*

As the various parties of this conflict exchange allegations, the real motive of this conflict remains baffling for many - is this a race for resources, is there a larger power struggle at play, or is it both? With several additional groups like the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and nations like the United States, China and neighbouring countries like Rwanda and Uganda having vested interests in this conflict, the situation in DRC is soon escalating into a proxy war of sorts.

This war is also an epitome of how war economies are sustained, a case that should be as compelling as perhaps the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement⁵, which again proves the point that the war in the DRC is not given the attention it requires. It is sad to see that the same nation that powers our mobile phones and electric vehicles is bleeding due to its ample resources that benefit the world. This resource-based aggression is a continuation of the colonial mindset, the sense of ownership that makes one group believe it is more deserving of resources than the other. The humanitarian catastrophe brought on by M23's comeback in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a part of a larger pattern of conflicts that have wreaked havoc on civilian populations all over the world.

Similar situations have arisen in Myanmar, where the Rohingya.⁶ People are persecuted by the state in Yemen⁷, where millions have been uprooted by an ongoing civil war. The conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia also had a significant humanitarian impact on West Africa. Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, was instrumental in inflaming violence by aiding the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, which exacerbated war crimes and mass displacement.⁸

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

John le Carré was right when he said, "Tomorrow was created yesterday... To ignore history is to ignore the wolf at the door."⁹ Only when humanity learns its lessons from the past can

⁵ 'WHAT IS BDS?' (BDS Movement) <<https://bdsmovement.net/what-bds>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ 'Charles Taylor aided and abetted Sierra Leone war crimes, Hague court finds' *The Guardian* (26 April 2012) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/26/charles-taylor-war-crimes-hague>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁹ 'A quote from A Most Wanted Man' (Goodreads) <<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/18587348-a-wanted-man#:~:text=%E2%80%9CSome%20old%20guy%20once%20said%20that%20the%20meaning,their%20cell%20phone%20>> accessed 24 March 2025

it advance towards a brighter future; thus, it is pertinent to first understand the historical context of this war before delving into the more analytical parts. From King Leopold II treating the region as his demesne to Congo's formal colonisation by Belgium in 1908, the nation has seen its fair share of exploitation and bloodshed.

After the assassination of its first Prime Minister, Lumumba, the DRC had seen decades of unstable authoritarian rule, which was further exacerbated by the ethnic tensions with Rwanda, where the Tutsi genocide displaced more than 300,000 persons to neighbouring countries, mainly the DRC.¹⁰ There was also a massive influx of Hutus, the other ethnic group of Rwanda, into the DRC, turning the region into an attack base, pushing Rwanda to back rebels within the DRC and ultimately leading to the two Congo Wars.

Coupled with the opposition to Mobutu's corrupt regime in DRC and the Hutu attacks on Rwanda and the Tutsi militia, DRC was caught in its first war lasting from 1996-1997. Forces like the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), led by Laurent-Desire Kabila, opposing the regime were supported by Rwandan allies like Uganda, Eritrea, Angola and Burundi. While the first war culminated with Kabila of AFDL becoming president, the premise for the Second Congo War between 1998-2003 was set with Kabila's fallout with the current Rwandan President, Paul Kagame.

More groups joined the conflict, such as the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) backed by Rwanda and the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC), allegedly backed by Uganda. The Congolese government, in the meantime, incited the Hutu refugees to fight against these rival groups. The second war eventually drew to a close with the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreements and the deployment of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUSCO.

THE RISE OF M23: ORIGINS AND MOTIVES

Former members of the CNDP (National Congress for the Defence of the People) made up the majority of the March 23 Movement (M23), a rebel organisation that first appeared in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2012. Claims of government

¹⁰ Shola Lawal, 'A guide to the decades-long conflict in DR Congo' *Al Jazeera* (21 February 2024) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/21/a-guide-to-the-decades-long-conflict-in-dr-congo>> accessed 24 March 2025

incompetence in carrying out the 2009 peace deal, ethnic grievances, and regional geopolitical tensions, particularly Rwanda's purported assistance for the group, were the main factors in its development. Even though M23's comeback has had serious humanitarian repercussions, it is a part of a larger trend of crises in war areas.¹¹ For example, according to UNHCR, Yemen's protracted civil conflict has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, with over 21 million people in need of aid.¹²

Like this, Human Rights Watch has reported that the Rohingya issue in Myanmar has caused the mass exodus of over 900,000 individuals because of military persecution.¹³ Over a million civilians have been displaced by M23's operations, according to reports from the UN and rights groups, which has increased insecurity in the Great Lakes region. The situation emphasises the necessity of stronger procedures and international diplomatic actions to address the underlying causes of armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Rebels, Retribution, and Rwanda's Shadow: In April 2012, the March 23 Movement (M23) emerged as a leading rebel group in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) eastern regions. M23, which consists predominantly of ethnic Tutsis, was created due to grievances that the Congolese government had failed to implement the 2009 peace accord with the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP). Improved political representation for Tutsi villages and the integration of CNDP fighters into the national army were promised under this agreement.¹⁴

The March 23, 2009, signing date of the agreement is referred to in the group's name, M23. Yet, due to alleged marginalisation by the DRC government and reneged commitments, dissatisfaction grew among former members of the CNDP. Due to such dissatisfaction, M23 emerged, accusing the government of poor leadership, poor army conditions, and the inability to alleviate the security fears of Tutsi communities within the province of North Kivu.¹⁵ One of the contentious aspects of M23's actions has been Rwanda's involvement.

¹¹ UK Government, *Report on M23 and DRC Conflict* UK Government, Democratic Republic of Congo Case Study (2018)

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Human Rights Watch, *Rohingya Reports* (2025)

¹⁴ 'M23 Rebels' (Vajiram & Ravi, 08 February 2025) <<https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-daily-current-affairs/prelims-pointers/m23-rebels/>> accessed 25 March 2025

¹⁵ 'Decoding The DRC Crisis: The M23 Rebellion And Its Historical Roots' *THE AFRICAN* (31 January 2025) <<https://iol.co.za/news/politics/opinion/2025-01-31-decoding-the-drc-crisis-the-m23-rebellion-and-its-historical-roots/>> accessed 25 March 2025

Rwanda has been alleged to have provided M23 with safe camps and military assistance. The need to protect Congolese Tutsis and fight the presence of Hutu rebel groups such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), which contains perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, was invoked by the Rwandan government as a reason for its intervention.¹⁶

M23: A Movement or A Mercenary Force - There has been debate regarding the way to describe M23. While it describes itself as a movement in favour of the rights and security of Congolese Tutsis and other minorities, others regard the group as a foreign-backed proxy force, particularly Rwandan, due to its behaviour and external links.

M23 captured the critical eastern DRC city of Goma in January 2025. Subsequently, the organisation handed over 288 mercenaries to Rwanda who previously worked for the government of the DRC. Having M23 in control of migration and customs, this move was linked to the reopening of the DRC-Rwanda border. Rwanda confirmed that such mercenaries' countries of origin requested assistance in doing so and asked them to prosecute the mercenaries involved.¹⁷

The group's profile has been made more complicated with its occupation of resource-endowed regions. Walikale, an important mining hub in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that has major deposits of tin and gold, was captured by M23 in March 2025. Not only did the occupation expand the territory under the control of M23, but it also offered access to vital resources, creating speculation regarding the group's agenda and the level of economic motivations behind its operations.

In turn, the global community sanctioned Rwandan authorities and M23 commanders accused of supporting the group. The authority of M23 persists despite these measures, highlighting the challenge of addressing the underlying issues precipitating the conflict. The

¹⁶ 'Analysis: M23 takes full control of Goma, hands over mercenaries to Rwanda' *CAJ News Africa* (30 January 2025) <<https://www.cajnewsafrica.com/2025/01/30/analysis-m23-takes-full-control-of-goma-hands-over-mercenaries-to-rwanda/>> accessed 25 March 2025

¹⁷ 'DR Congo's Conflict: Rwanda's motives to support the M23 rebels' (*Robert Lansing Institute*, 23 February 2024) <<https://lansinginstitute.org/2024/02/23/dr-congos-conflict-rwandas-motives-to-support-the-m23-rebels/>> accessed 24 March 2025

ability of the group to persist is indicative of a complex interplay between regional dynamics, local discontent, and international interests.¹⁸

FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT AND PROXY WARFARE

Rwandan Involvement: It was found by a 2023 UN Group of Experts Report¹⁹ that Rwanda has been directly supporting and arming the March 23 Movement. Rwandan President Kagame has, however, continued to deny Kigali's role in this conflict but has justified previous Rwandan interventions under the pretext of protecting Congolese Tutsis. Another paradoxical move by Rwanda has been its involvement in the recent ceasefire talks with the DRC mediated by Qatar.²⁰ This move can be expounded as an indirect acknowledgement of its involvement in the conflict, however, that would be jumping the gun, as one common trait amongst the various warring groups is their zest for evading accountability. According to the UN Experts Report, there is evidence of the Rwandan military's presence at M23 base camps in Tchanzu, near the Rwandan border.

It has been found that even children are trained in these camps. Geolocated images have also been used to identify the Rwandan military in Sake. The report further finds that the M23 rebels have extracted around \$800,000 a month from coltan trading, and Rwanda receives part of this coveted mineral, proving that this conflict is not only about power but also for some form of economic predominance.

Uganda's Role: When it comes to discussing Ugandan involvement, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) can be seen as the main player emerging from Uganda, who claim to be fighting for an Islamic State in Uganda, where Muslims make up a minority. It formed its base in a weak DRC, much like the other factions in this conflict, making use of an already fragile region to further their cause. In some ways, the Ugandan troops manifested their presence in the region through ADF, with the group now having allegedly formed links with ISIS.²¹

¹⁸ 'M23 rebels capture strategic mining hub of Walikale in eastern DRC' *The Guardian* (20 March 2025) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/20/m23-rebels-capture-strategic-mining-hub-of-walikale-in-eastern-drc>> accessed 24 March 2025

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ Wycliffe Muia, 'DR Congo and Rwanda call for ceasefire in conflict with M23 rebels' *BBC* (19 March 2025) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1mn21km5rlo>> accessed 24 March 2025

²¹ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Democratic Republic of the Congo* (2019)

The Race between China and the U S: The geopolitical race for wealth between China and the U.S does not end with their limited geographical positions; this race has been furthered in other fragile and war-torn regions and turned them into a chessboard of sorts, with no regard for the people suffering as both these countries move pawn after pawn. It is not going to be long before one of the parties moves a queen piece in the region.

When it comes to the U S, its gameplay in the region has been offering access to its resources in exchange for the DRC's rich minerals. The US in the past, under the Obama administration, has pressured Rwanda for its support to M23, and under the Biden administration, attempted to foster the Eastern African Community-led Nairobi Peace process²² and the Luanda Agreement.²³ However, all these efforts were undone in January 2025 with M23's instantaneous offensive in Goma and Bukavu. The U S has also backed the U.N. and others in calling out Rwanda and sanctioning connected persons like the Rwandan Minister James Kabarebe and M23 spokesperson, Lawrence Kanyuka Kingston.²⁴

China's game differs from the U.S in the sense that it is mostly based on economic ties rather than diplomatic efforts. While the U.S has been focused on foreign policy, the Chinese have been securing their grip on essential mineral-based supply chains, particularly cobalt. The smartphones used by us are thus extracted from DRC and assembled in China, and while this may seem like an innocent process of manufacturing, this practice stands on many deeper motives. China, using its popular investment strategy, has come to own 15 of DRC's 19 cobalt and copper sites.²⁵

China's investment in mining projects, its ability to negotiate deals in its favour and its lobbying have led to China having significant control over the region and a powerful contrast to US domination. China offers a seemingly laid-back no strings attached presence that seems to attract the Congolese.

²² *Ibid*

²³ Josephine Kalembe, 'What Has the Luanda Peace Process Achieved?' (*The Great Lakes Eye*, 24 December 2024) <https://thegreatlakeseye.com/post?s=What--has--the--Luanda--peace--process--achieved%3F--_1634> accessed 24 March 2025

²⁴ 'Treasury Sanctions Rwandan Minister and Senior Militant for Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo' (*US Department of the Treasury*, 20 February 2025) <<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0022>> accessed 24 March 2025

²⁵ *Ibid*

Given DRC's shift towards the US for its growing security requirements, it is pertinent to assess how this will impact the US-China race in the DRC. While China's decades-long investment in Congolese mines has given it an edge over the U.S in terms of mineral wealth like cobalt and coltan, President Tshisekedi's talks with the U.S might just make a match to China's mineral empire. While DRC has only expressed interest in partnerships with the U.S, this association might give the U.S just the opportunity it requires in DRC. However, China is unlikely to sit back and watch, it may retaliate with a counter-offer or worse, become another puppeteer in this proxy war. Although it might seem far-fetched for now, a Chinese alliance with Rwanda to counter the United States' growing influence in the DRC may also be anticipated.

The Ukraine Connection: A Jeopardising Minerals Deal? The developments in the DRC-U.S. Minerals deal may bring to mind a similar deal between the United States and Ukraine. Identifying similar patterns paves the way to reasonably anticipate similar outcomes. With President Trump stating that the deal with Ukraine will be signed soon and the US proposing more critical minerals and even attempting to gain access to Ukraine's nuclear power, it is evident that this is not a deal of equals. Ukraine has to contribute 50% of the proceeds from its future profits from state-owned resources, atop the existing conditions. Just as President Zelensky was humiliated and overpowered in the White House, is the DRC taking a step that would put it on the same path as Ukraine?

This may be answered through a scrutiny of DRC's actions with Russia. The DRC has been clever enough to counterbalance both the U.S and China with Russia on its side, supporting both militarily in providing training and arms through troops and diplomatically in international forums.²⁶ If DRC were to further this relationship with Russia in the renewed context of the January 2025 M23 ambush, then it would send a strong message to the U.S that the DRC is not another Ukraine.

Role of Regional Entities in the DRC: While the role of foreign powers in the region has now been explored, it is now necessary to shift closer to the battlefield to understand who is directly involved in this conflict. The DRC has recently been accused of supporting the

²⁶ Kristof Titeca, 'Russian influence, anti-Western sentiments and African agency: The struggle for influence in the Democratic Republic of Congo' (2023) 45(1) Strategic Review of Southern Africa
<<https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v45i1.4617>> accessed 27 March 2025

Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a predominantly Hutu militia, to counter Rwanda's backing of the M23.²⁷ Currently, the most active armed groups in the region include the M23, FDLR, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO). Thus, there have been entities other than the M23 complicating the power dynamics in the region. For instance, the CODECO is an agricultural cooperative-turned-ethnic militia group backing the Lendu people against the Hema and is known to have carried out attacks in the Ituri province in the past. It has now turned towards controlling gold mines and exploiting resources.²⁸

As discussed, the ADF from Uganda has carried forward its fight for an Islamic State from Uganda to the DRC. Its link with ISIS has allowed it to carry out raids, bombings, and massacres, dragging innocent Congolese into a war for a cause they are not even aware of.

On the other hand, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) have, as discussed earlier, allegedly been providing weapons and other backing to FDLR, confirmed by Human Rights Watch and UN Reports.²⁹ Alongside the FDLR, a Mai vigilante group that is pro-government, called the Wazalendos, has also been an active part of the fight against M23. Around 40,000 Wazalendos have been militarily trained since 2022 to fight against M23 and other anti-Congolese groups. However, these actions cannot be mistaken as mere patriotic uprisings when these groups have taken to extrajudicial killings of civilians and sexual assault of locals.

THE ROLE OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE CONFLICT

A Kingdom Without a Crown – Why Isn't the DRC the Richest Nation on Earth? Many natural resources, including vast deposits of cobalt, diamonds, gold, copper, and other minerals, are rich in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). A total of \$24 trillion is the estimated worth of the untapped mineral wealth of the DRC. Despite this vast potential, the DRC remains one of the poorest countries in the world because of continued war and underdevelopment. This paradox has been attributed at times to the resource curse, a phenomenon where countries with high natural resource endowments experience poor

²⁷ 'DR Congo: Army Units Aided Abusive Armed Groups' (*Human Rights Watch*, 18 October 2022) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/18/dr-congo-army-units-aided-abusive-armed-groups>> accessed 24 March 2025

²⁸ Lawal (n 10)

²⁹ DR Congo's Conflict: Rwanda's motives to support the M23 rebels (n 17)

development results and sluggish growth due to such factors as conflict, poor institutions, and corruption.

In the past, the DRC's richness of resources has been more of a curse than an asset. These resources are turning into a source of internal and external conflict and competition instead of encouraging economic development and progress. Foreign militias, international businesses, and local warlords have all been attracted by the prospect of huge natural wealth in the region and are now engaged in a struggle for dominance. This mad dash has often led to violence, exploitation, and human rights abuses, preventing the country from leveraging its resources for the benefit of its people.³⁰

War Economies and the Price of Chaos: The concept of a war economy is particularly pertinent to the long-running conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Extension of conflict becomes a profitable venture for certain organisations in such an economy. External and internal armed forces have sponsored their operations by capitalising on the country's mineral resources. For instance, funds earned through illegal mineral trading, including diamonds, gold, and coltan, have been utilised to finance militias and procure arms.³¹ Money obtained through the illicit trade in minerals, including gold, diamonds, and coltan, has been widely utilised to buy weapons and support militias.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) exported about 1,918 metric tons of coltan in 2023, which was somewhat less than Rwanda's 2,070 metric tons, according to UN Comtrade data. But according to estimates, a sizable amount of these exports might come from illegal sources, with armed organisations like M23 in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo sneaking coltan into Rwanda, where it is mislabelled as conflict-free and marketed all over the world.

Furthermore, 43,000 kg of gold were produced in the DRC in 2022, with significant amounts allegedly being smuggled and used to finance armed organisations.³² Through intricate supply chains, multinational firms may have an indirect connection to this commerce.

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ 'Congo Resources: Who Benefits?' (*Congo Planet*, 05 June 2010) <<https://www.congoplanet.com/news/1667/congo-resources-who-benefits-mineral-ressources-coltan-katanga-conflict-minerals.jsp>> accessed 24 March 2025

³² Chloé Farand, 'Halt illegal imports of conflict minerals from DRC, campaigners urge EU' *The Guardian* (15 January 2025) <<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/15/democratic-republic-congo-drc-eu-halt-imports-conflict-minerals-drc-campaigners-urge-eu>> accessed 24 March 2025

Numerous international tech and auto firms purchase minerals from vendors who, whether on purpose or not, purchase raw materials from areas afflicted by war.

Companies like Apple, Tesla, and Intel, for example, have reportedly relied on supply chain due diligence programs that could unintentionally launder conflict minerals from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Measures to reduce such risks are outlined in the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas.³³

The impact of regulatory measures on supply chain openness is demonstrated through case studies of corporate accountability initiatives under Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Act³⁴. For instance, Intel has put in place a Responsible Minerals Sourcing Policy, making due diligence reports available to the public and working to guarantee that none of its products include conflicts with the DRC. But problems still exist because some companies source minerals through unaffiliated middlemen, underscoring the need for stricter enforcement and greater openness³⁵. This scenario is evident through the latest actions of the March 23 Movement (M23) rebels. The principal mining hub of Walikale, a town with extensive tin and gold reserves in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, was captured by M23 in March 2025. Aside from providing the rebels with access to valuable resources, this capture severed vital supply lines, further destabilising the region.

With armed groups vying for land that could finance their causes, this act is evidence of how possession of resource-dense locations will make war more rampant. In addition, the situation is exacerbated by global demand for the minerals. The DRC is endowed with minerals such as cobalt and coltan, which are essential to the world's IT industries. As various stakeholders attempt to reap from the turmoil, the high demand and lucrative nature of the resources spur continuous exploitation and war.

Who Really Controls Congo's Wealth? There is competition and disagreement over access to the DRC's vast mineral resources. While these resources are technically owned by the Congolese state, a complicated web of individuals controls and directs them. Mining regions

³³ 'DRC: Apple, Tesla & Intel may source "conflict minerals" through failing responsible mineral scheme' (Global Witness, 27 April 2022) <<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/press-releases/drc-apple-tesla-intel-may-source-conflict-minerals-through-failing-responsible-mineral-scheme>> accessed 24 March 2025

³⁴ Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act 2010, s 1502

³⁵ *Ibid*

are often controlled by local warlords and armed groups, who extract minerals using illegal practices and coercive labour.

These groups sell the minerals on the black market and use the money to finance more conflicts and entrench their grip on power.³⁶ There are also foreign organisations that play an equally significant role. It is claimed that countries in the immediate neighbourhood, notably Rwanda and Uganda, have assisted rebel groups such as M23 in accessing areas with minerals. Because of the global demand for electronics and other commodities, multinationals, traders, and companies purchase conflict minerals often without regard to their origin.

The government of the Congo is unable to exercise control over these resources because of corruption and low capacity. Little has been done to formalise the mining sector and establish transparency mechanisms. The illicit exploitation thrives as a result of weak governance institutions, robbing the nation of critical funds that can be used for development. In a bid to overcome these challenges, President Félix Tshisekedi proposed to the U.S. administration in February 2025 to seek access to the DRC's minerals in return for assistance in combating rebel groups such as M23. With world powers becoming aware of the strategic importance of mineral resources in the DRC, this move illustrates the intricate interplay between global politics and resource access.³⁷

THE GHOSTS OF THE PAST: REBEL GROUPS AND ETHNIC TENSIONS

The Ghosts of 1994 – FDLR and the Unfinished Business of Genocide: The FDLR, created in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide of 1994, consisted primarily of Hutu extremists who orchestrated general crimes against the Tutsi population. Most of these individuals fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the genocide, where they regrouped and formed the FDLR. Because of its role in various human rights abuses, such as killings, rape, and conscription of children into the military, this group's presence in the DRC has been a source of perpetual tension and conflict. Because they still propagate the extreme ideology that drove the 1994 crimes, the FDLR's continued existence in the DRC symbolises the

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ Benoit Faucon et al., 'War-Torn Congo Has a Deal for Trump: Kick Out Rebels, Get Minerals' (*The Wall Street Journal*, 19 March 2025) <<https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/war-torn-congo-has-a-deal-for-trump-kick-out-rebels-get-minerals-295acfb4>> accessed 24 March 2025

unfinished business of the genocide. Their actions impede attempts at peacebuilding and reconciliation while also destabilising the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and posing a continuous threat to regional security.

Kigali's Fear of Armed Hutu Groups – Myth or Reality? Hutu armed groups such as the FDLR have long been a cause of concern to Rwanda's government, dominated by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Kigali believes that such groups pose a serious security risk to Rwanda and harbour genocidal intentions. Backing proxy forces that aim to neutralise the FDLR and military interventions in the DRC have been premised on this perceived threat. While remaining a destabilising element, some analysts question the level of danger posed by the FDLR, stating that their capacity to conduct significant operations against Rwanda has declined over time. Portraying the FDLR as a significant threat, critics state, might be an overestimation, and is used as a pretext for political and military activity in the region.³⁸

The Jihadist Wildcard – ADF and the Islamic State in Central Africa: The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a former Ugandan rebel faction, has become a strong jihadist group active mainly in the eastern DRC. In recent years, the ADF has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, renaming itself as the Islamic State's Central Africa Province (ISCAP). The alignment has focused more attention on the activities of the group and has intensified fears of the spread of global jihadist networks into Central Africa. The ADF/ISCAP has conducted many attacks against civilians and security personnel, using methods like bombings, assassinations, and ambushes. They have escalated the humanitarian crisis in the region and displaced a vast majority of individuals. Even under military pressure, the group's resilience and resourcefulness point towards the challenges involved in combating insurgencies well-entrenched within local populations and with access to global support systems³⁹.

HUMANITARIAN IMPACT AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The Cost of Conflict: Mass Displacement and Violence: The DRC is going through one of the most severe displacement crises worldwide due to the persistent wars there. Enhancing violence has led to the internal displacement of over 7 million individuals as of 2025, primarily in the eastern regions. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced due to the

³⁸ 'Rwanda: separating myths from reality' (Linda Melvern, 21 May 2021)

<<https://lindamelvern.com/2021/05/21/rwanda-separating-myths-from-reality/>> accessed 24 March 2025

³⁹ *Ibid*

humanitarian crisis being fuelled by recent offensives of the M23 rebels, most notably the capture of strategic territories such as Goma, Bukavu, and Walikale.⁴⁰

Shortages of food, restricted access to health care, and deteriorating living conditions in overpopulated displacement camps are all direct outcomes of this mass displacement, exacerbating underlying vulnerabilities. The repetitiveness of the violence eliminates the possibility of return by the displaced individuals to their homes and livelihoods, as stated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has highlighted the urgent need for humanitarian assistance.⁴¹

Systemic War Crimes: Who Bears the Responsibility? Several actors have committed war crimes and serious breaches of human rights in the conflict in the DRC. There has been an association of sexual exploitation, recruitment of child soldiers, and extrajudicial executions with armed forces, such as the M23 rebels. Human Rights Watch records that the M23 has, in the past, committed war crimes and crimes against humanity and other mass violations of civilians' rights⁴².

Human rights violations have also been reported against the Congolese army (FARDC). Some FARDC soldiers have perpetrated crimes like extrajudicial killings and rape, reports indicate. The general impunity culture has been noted by the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO), which has reported several cases of serious violations perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.⁴³

Accountability is compounded by the involvement of foreign organisations. For instance, Rwanda has repeatedly denied claims that it sponsors the M23 rebels. Stability in the region is heavily influenced by this alleged support, as well as raising questions about the roles neighbouring countries play in perpetuating or stopping the war.

The Path to Accountability and Justice: Accountability in the DRC is hard to come by. With soldiers being tried and convicted of offences such as terrorism and rape, the national legal system has sought to respond to abuses of human rights. Yet political interference,

⁴⁰ UK Government (n 11)

⁴¹ 'DR Congo Emergency' (UNHCR) <<https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/dr-congo-emergency>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁴² Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2024: Democratic Republic of Congo' (2024)

⁴³ OHCHR, *Accountability Report 2016: Democratic Republic of Congo* (2016)

insufficient capacity to manage the number of offences, and a lack of resources often interfere with these efforts.⁴⁴

These issues have also been tried to be solved by international mechanisms. Few individuals have been prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for offences in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), but these cases only begin to address the abuses that have occurred there. The UN has called for comprehensive strategies to fight impunity, including strengthening the Congolese justice system and ensuring the protection of human rights defenders.⁴⁵

THE RESPONSE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Huge uproars have been heard from the international community for wars between Russia-Ukraine and Palestine, however, the community is relatively silent when it comes to the matters of the Central African conflict. Is it because of the popular speculation that there is a selective sense of justice at play when it comes to African countries? Strong proponents of the Critical Race Theory will have one believe it is merely due to continued discrimination, citing that out of the 54 individuals indicted by the International Criminal Court to date, 47 happen to be Africans.⁴⁶

While this theory is compelling and could be, to a large extent true, we cannot rule out the possibility that the international community is reacting the way it is, not due to some form of racial supremacy, but because the DRC is a resource hub, unlike the other nations engaged in deadly wars, and that any direct action on the matter could cost nations a lot of important imports. There has thus been indirect politics of aid, sanctions, and diplomacy in this war, allowing countries to secure their interests at this critical juncture of the DRC's history.

UN's Reaction: The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on February 21, 2025, passed Resolution 2773, officially criticising Rwanda's involvement in the DRC and its support to

⁴⁴ 'War Crimes and Human Rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo' (*Democracy & Society*, 17 May 2021) <<https://democracyandsociety.net/2021/05/17/war-crimes-and-human-rights-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo/>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁴⁵ Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act 2010, s 1502

⁴⁶ Melissa Hendrickse, 'A chance for Africa to counter the pitfalls of international criminal justice?' (*Amnesty International*, 22 April 2024) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/a-chance-for-africa-to-counter-the-pitfalls-of-international-criminal-justice/>> accessed 24 March 2025

M23.⁴⁷ The UNSC has urged the European Union Commission to suspend its MoU with Rwanda unless it withdraws its troops from the region, as a form of Sanction. However, EU officials have not yet decided on any direct sanctions restricting their reaction to suspending defence consultations and exploring the severance of economic ties with Rwanda. As actions have spoken louder than words, the EU's lack of action in this matter may be proving an unrelated point made by many about the inefficiency of the UN in handling modern-day wars and conflicts.

Other Nations: Other nations like Canada and Germany announced the partial suspension of ties and diplomatic efforts with Rwanda in March 2025, and the United Kingdom suspended part of its military cooperation and aid with Rwanda in February 2025.⁴⁸ Belgium has also been an open critic of Rwanda this year. However, Rwanda has not been submissively accepting these sanctions against it. Rwanda pulled an unexpected move by taking the lead in suspending its development program with Belgium after the statements made in Brussels.

The U S, of course, being one of the first countries to condemn Rwanda's involvement, expressed its commitment towards taking necessary actions against those entities contributing to the instability in DRC. This statement was made in the wake of the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctions. While in the past, the Obama administration has strongly berated Rwanda for its support to M23, this time round, the U.S reaction is known to be focused on a mutually beneficial minerals deal. While these passive steps may have temporarily succeeded in calming the situation, there is no adverse effect on the Rwandan troops. With the U.S stalling any important decision in this regard, the DRC is growing more impatient with each death count going up.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Extended hostilities have deterred foreign investment and resulted in economic disruptions. The closure of key businesses, like the brewery in Bralima, illustrates the way volatility has

⁴⁷ 'Security Council Strongly Condemns Ongoing Offensives by M23 Rebel Movement in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2773' (UN, 21 February 2025) <<https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16004.doc.htm>> accessed 19 March 2025

⁴⁸ William James, 'UK to Suspend Bilateral Aid to Rwanda Over Congo Conflict' *Reuters* (26 February 2025) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/uk-pause-bilateral-aid-rwanda-over-congo-conflict-2025-02-25/>> accessed 24 March 2025

hindered economic growth. One of the worst humanitarian disasters ever has been triggered by the continuous hostilities, which have displaced millions of individuals from their residences. Competition over resources has undermined state institutions and promoted corruption, hindering governance and making it often ineffective. The DRC's instability has generated tensions and wars in the region as instability has spread to neighbouring countries.

A Nation Trapped in Crisis: Political Instability in the DRC: The DRC has experienced perpetual political instability since gaining independence from Belgium in 1960. A succession of authoritarian regimes, coups, and wars followed the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the nation's initial prime minister. In addition to over 200 ethnic groups, the nation's vast and diverse terrain has rendered the country's administration even more challenging and intensified.

Instability has grown in recent years as a result of the emergence of armed groups, most notably the March 23 Movement (M23). The M23 rebels' attack grew considerably in March 2025 when they captured the strategic mining hub of Walikale in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Besides being a strategic hub connecting four provinces, the town is endowed with tin and gold deposits, which enhances the rebels' strength and erodes official control.⁴⁹

Far-reaching economic consequences have been the result of the political upheavals. For instance, Heineken's Bukavu Bralima brewery, which is one of the biggest economic players in the region, was compelled to shut down because of the ongoing conflict. Apart from affecting the operation of the brewery, the closure had a ripple effect on other companies in the vicinity and the livelihoods of countless individuals who relied on the supply chain.⁵⁰

The Mineral Curse: Wealth That Brings War: The DRC's rich mineral wealth has done more harm than good. The resource curse theory argues that countries with a wealth of natural resources often experience poor developmental results due to issues like disputes over resource control, corruption, and rent-seeking behaviour. Rivalry for lucrative mineral resources has fuelled conflict in the DRC as various armed groups compete to control mining

⁴⁹ UK Government (n 11)

⁵⁰ Sonia Rolley, 'Congo conflict shuts Heineken brewery, cripples economy' *Reuters* (20 March 2025) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-conflict-shutters-heineken-brewery-cripples-economy-2025-03-20/>> accessed 24 March 2025

areas. The government has lost significant revenue because of illegal mining and smuggling of minerals. The legal economy has also been eroded by armed groups that have established parallel taxation systems and extorted businesspersons and miners. Apart from financing rebel activity, this shadow economy fuels the cycle of violence and instability.

In addition, the internal conflicts in the DRC have been linked to international supply chains as a result of demand for minerals such as cobalt and coltan, which are required by current technologies. As various stakeholders, both foreign and domestic, gain from the existing situation, the international demand has at times fostered the continuity of conflict.⁵¹

SOLUTIONS AND THE PATH FORWARD

On Congo's Resource Curse: DRC's boon has often worked as its bane, due to which many entities aim to exploit the region. As discussed, minerals like cobalt, gold, copper and coltan typically run everything from our mobile phones to defence. This has attracted many ill intentions towards the region. The same mentality of the colonialists who believed that their colonies were incapable of handling their resources is being seen here. This exploitation does not end with the mere extraction of minerals from the Congolese Land. It is also an empire fostering child labour, where over 70% of global cobalt from CRC is mined by young ones.⁵² Corporate impunity in a place such as the DRC must be taken very seriously.

The past teaches us that many a time, huge corporations that benefit from wars in mineral-rich nations often get away with profits at the cost of human lives without directly being involved in these wars. A step towards addressing this was taken by 13 Congolese families in a lawsuit filed in a Washington DC court against some of the world's largest tech companies like Alphabet, Apple Tesla, Microsoft and others, for their role in forced labour and other human rights violations in the DRC, particularly those leading to death of children.⁵³ However, the US Court has unsurprisingly failed to hold these companies liable, siding with the corporate giants, rendering this attempt futile. It is thus time for the DRC to

⁵¹ 'Can the Democratic Republic of Congo's Mineral Resources Provide a Pathway to Peace?' (UNEP, 20 September 2022) <<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/can-democratic-republic-congos-mineral-resources-provide-pathway-peace>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab, 'Are These Tech Companies Complicit In Human Rights Abuses Of Child Cobalt Miners In Congo?' (Forbes, 13 January 2020) <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2020/01/13/are-these-tech-companies-complicit-in-human-rights-abuses-of-child-cobalt-miners-in-congo/>> accessed 24 March 2025

break away from such influences, starting with rapid governance reforms on assessing current foreign investments, raids of mines employing children and other important crackdowns to protect its sovereignty.

The DRC must shift its focus towards strengthening its healthcare at the time of war by tying up with international donors and overcoming regional corruption. Further, other nations must apply strong sanctions on Rwanda and Uganda and put more diplomatic pressure on these nations profiting from illegal mining and war. At a global level, more binding and secure laws that govern Global Trade are required. The one flaw of international law, its non-binding nature, has allowed far too many exploiters to get away. Thus, by embracing its resources and not hiding them in fear, DRC must hold economic predators accountable and walk past colonial perceptions of African nations.

Addressing Regional Insecurities - The Approach towards Proxies and Rebel Groups: Be it in Syria, Yemen (Iran and Saudi Arabia) or the war between the two Koreas, there has been the presence of larger nations in almost every war, including in the DRC's case. DRC's conflict, however, has multiple levels of proxies, further complicating the situation. When you ask the M23 rebels what they want, they will tell you they want amnesty for past violence against them, the return of Tutsi refugees, etc.

The ADF would answer that they want to establish Islamic ideology in the state, and the FDLR would claim that their fight is for the Hutus. However, it is essential to recognise that these factions have motives deeper than ethnic, religious, and patriotic goals. Sustainable action must be taken to ensure long-term peace in the region, starting with effective dialogues and ceasefires that are honoured and implemented.

As a last resort, military action from a coalition of nations may also be warranted against groups that refuse to disarm and are constantly attacking civilian populations. As a lasting measure, former rebels must be given some sort of employment offer and vocational training, as most of them are pushed into this world due to poverty and lack of opportunities.

For this to be successful, immediate parties to the conflict must find common ground, starting with their parent nations, Rwanda, Uganda, and the DRC. An immediate measure would be to harmonise a deal between M23 and DRC amidst ongoing talks, which seem stale as of now. M23 must be coerced into an agreement through added pressures on Rwanda, which

will compromise M23's ability to retaliate. An alternative measure would be to resume the 2013 Kampala talks with an added focus and pressure on FDLR, in a manner, incentivises Rwanda and brokers a fair deal to destabilise the situation. Many may argue that this solution is unfair to the DRC, however, the priority must be disarmament and peace, and for that, both parties and their proxies must be ready to put their guns down.

An important legal consideration in this regard is assessing Rwanda's international responsibility under the Law of State Responsibility⁵⁴, or, in other words, asking if Rwanda can be legally held accountable. The various grounds under Articles of State Responsibility (ASR) Articles 4, 5, and 8-11 may be reviewed for this purpose. Article 8 of ASR may be the most relevant provision for Rwanda as it attributes any instruction, direction, or control of a group by a state under the ASR.

The International Law Commission's commentary further makes it easier to bring Rwanda under the ambit of this Article, as it clarifies that the existence of just one of these actions is sufficient.⁵⁵ Additionally, if the requisites under Article 8 are fulfilled, Rwanda could also be obligated to provide reparations for its direct role in the conflict under Articles 28-39. However, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) laid down a stricter test in the Bosnian Genocide Case, which requires the happening of particular Paramilitary Actions to be taken by the state to establish a violation of international law.⁵⁶ In this regard, it may be required to establish M23 as a de facto state organ to bring Rwanda under the purview of ASR.

COMPARATIVE POST-CONFLICT MODELS

The Case of Sierra Leone: Both Sierra Leone and DRC share similarities in the basic structure of their conflicts, that is, in the form of resource-fuelled violence consisting of mass atrocities and active involvement of international actors. However, the situation in Sierra Leone has drastically improved since the end of the civil war in 2002. The West African nation has made significant strides in terms of disarmament, resettlement of refugees, conducting elections and peace-making. Firstly, Sierra Leone had a hybrid court to balance international and municipal jurisdiction in the form of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which was set up to

⁵⁴ *Bosnia and Herzegovina v Serbia and Montenegro* [2007] ICJ Rep 43

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

specifically address serious crimes against civilians committed during the decade-long civil war in the nation.

The court was successful in prosecuting leaders of rebel groups such as the Revolutionary United Front, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, the Civil Defence Forces, as well as former Liberian President Charles Taylor for war crimes.⁵⁷ The SCSL was the first international criminal tribunal to prosecute individuals for the use of child soldiers.⁵⁸ The work of the special court thus eventually paved the way for the strengthening of judicial mechanisms and the rule of law in the region. Similarly, the DRC conflict also calls for a specialised tribunal or court to be established in the region. As highlighted by ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan, the ICC's efforts in the region have not yielded any favourable outcomes in the years.⁵⁹ Thus, the last resort for wartime justice in the region may just be a hybrid court model.

Further, Sierra Leone's economic recovery model post-conflict has also been commendable at the macroeconomic level. Since the end of the war, the GDP growth has been around 4%, reflecting a recovering economy as opposed to wartime.⁶⁰ Some community-driven projects, such as the Go Bifo project, have been empowering communities by providing \$100 to each household and providing tools for managing resources.⁶¹

Given DRC's vast mineral resources, a similar project to empower the ordinary Congolese would not only generate employment and economic growth but also reduce dependence on multinational corporations and foreign governments, thereby reducing instances of human rights violations in resource extraction. Other measures adopted in Sierra Leone include decentralisation by bringing frontline workers and higher-level officials together to respond to local needs, encouraging civic involvement to create opportunities for citizens in the

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁹ 'Decades of DR Congo atrocities require special court: ICC prosecutor' *The Jordan Times* (28 February 2025) <<https://jordantimes.com/news/world/decades-dr-congo-atrocities-require-special-court-icc-prosecutor>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁶⁰ Paul Collier and Marguerite Duponchel, 'The economic legacy of civil war: Firm level evidence from Sierra Leone' (2010) WIDER Working Paper, No. 2010/90 <<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/54084/1/636759008.pdf>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁶¹ Katherine Casey et al., *The GoBifo Project Evaluation Report: Assessing the Impacts of Community-Driven Development in Sierra Leone* (2013)

government with 'bottom-up' community initiatives and investing in agriculture by piloting inventory credit schemes for farmers.⁶²

The Liberian Model: Having assessed the Sierra Leone side of recovery, it is only natural to look into and draw inspiration from the other side of the coin in these conflicts, Liberia. Liberia's post-conflict recuperation strategies revolve around the reformation of its security sector, infrastructural expansion, international assistance, and youth engagement. The UN Mission in Liberia successfully disarmed more than 100,000 fighters between 2003-2004 through the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Program.⁶³ A similar step is required in DRC, where reintegration must precede disarmament to convince the various factions to disarm and demobilise, and this may be encouraged through certain economic and social benefits as previously suggested. As per a UNHCR Report, some benefits to the combatants included health care, vocational training, schooling and a stipend upon completion of the demobilisation program.⁶⁴

To successfully implement these measures, substantial financial resources would be required, mainly through international collaboration. Considering the plethora of international actors in the DRC conflict, it would only be fitting for them to contribute to a post-war DRC. Just like how Liberia received foreign assistance from the EU, the United States, China etc, such commitment might be required even in the DRC. However, this may be difficult to obtain considering how the US's recent isolationist politics under the Trump administration are impacting aid going from other nations as well. There are also other means of obtaining financial assistance, for instance, Liberia secured a total debt relief of US\$ \$4.6 billion under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative by the IMF and World Bank, which reduced its external debt stock by more than 90%.⁶⁵

The Liberian Model of recovery is unique for its involvement and use of the youth of the nation as catalysts for transformation. Since the Liberian Civil Wars (1989-2003) drastically interrupted the lives of many young persons, several Youth-led initiatives have been

⁶² *Ibid*

⁶³ Wolf-Christian Paes, 'The challenges of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in Liberia' (2005) 12(5) International Peacekeeping <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13533310500066537>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁶⁴ Hélène Caux and Sarah Brownell, 'Liberia's disarmament process off to a good start' (UNHCR, 08 December 2003) <<https://www.unhcr.org/in/news/liberias-disarmament-process-good-start>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁶⁵ 'IMF Survey: Liberia Wins \$4.6 Billion in Debt Relief from IMF, World Bank' (IMF Survey Online, 29 June 2010) <<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/53/socar062910a>> accessed 24 March 2025

working towards long-term stability. The work of the National Coalition on Youth Peace and Security (YPS) has actively institutionalised youth engagement in peace and security processes. Nearly 70% of DRC is under the age of 24, making it all the more important for the youth of DRC to be actively involved in the post-conflict efforts.

The Role of Regional Organisations: Articles 52, 53, and 54 of the UN Charter⁶⁶ State that regional organisations may engage in peace and security efforts. Organisations like the African Union (AU) and East African Community (EAC) must take a more proactive role in the DRC conflict to ensure that post-conflict measures remain sustainable through regional cooperation. Previous efforts like the Luanda Process under the AU auspices have failed in their efforts due to distrust and a lack of cooperation.

To date, only 800 of the promised 2900 South African troops promised, have been sent to the region.⁶⁷ The AU must construct a coherent strategy to firstly, reduce the number of external players and the competition for power in the region, then, focus on developing a permanent peacekeeping force rather than temporary deployments and leverage UNSCR 2719⁶⁸ to finance AU-led operations.

Further, the EAC's Treaty⁶⁹ Articles 123 and 124, along with the Protocol on Peace and Security,⁷⁰ already include objectives to restore peace and for conflict resolution. To beget long-term stability in the region, the EAC must coordinate its efforts with the AU and avoid multiple regional initiatives. Existing peacekeeping efforts like MONUSCO could be strengthened by coordinating with regional forces like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC) and the African Standby Force (ASF) with some additional resource allocation by the AU's Crisis Reserve Facility.

Mitigating Corporate Impunity: A 2011 DRC mandate and national law established that all mining and mineral trading companies must follow the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines on trading of natural resources, allowing for

⁶⁶ Charter of the United Nations 1945, art 52

⁶⁷ Hubert Kinkoh, 'Bold African Union role needed to stabilise east DRC' (*ISS Today*, 10 May 2024) <<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/bold-african-union-role-needed-to-stabilise-east-drc>> accessed 2 April 2025

⁶⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2023

⁶⁹ Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community 1999

⁷⁰ Protocol on Peace and Security of the East African Community 2013

only clean and traceable minerals to be subjects of trade. The Congolese government, following this, had also suspended two Chinese companies- TTT Mining and Huaying Trading Company in 2012,⁷¹ in a critical first step to reclaim control over its resources. By 2023, an estimated 94% of companies reported having conformed to the OECD's due diligence.⁷² However, despite these steps, corporations still get away with their exploitation in this region. These corporations can be held responsible under the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises through National Contact Points (NCP),⁷³ which act as government-backed grievance mechanisms that are non-judicial. Since the OECD Guidelines are somewhat binding on signatory governments, individuals or groups within the DRC can report instances of corporate malpractice to the NCP of the concerned company's headquarters. The NCP then looks into allegations and facilitates dialogue between the affected parties and the company in the form of mediation, and required circumstances, the NCP may take corrective actions to address the same.

CONCLUSION

An already dire humanitarian disaster is being compounded by escalating hostilities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), particularly the return of the M23 rebel group. The M23 progressed further west than in previous offensives in early 2025, capturing key territories, such as the strategic mining hub of Walikale. With well over 7 million internally displaced and more than 1 million asylum seekers in the neighbouring nations, this re-emergence has caused unimaginable casualties and displacement. Over 100 factions of armed men, each having their own goals and adding to the instability in the region, also make this conflict more intricate.⁷⁴

Major global attention has been brought to the DRC's vast mineral wealth, including critical commodities such as cobalt, lithium, and coltan. President Félix Tshisekedi presented U.S. President Donald Trump with access to these minerals in return for assistance against M23

⁷¹ *Ibid*

⁷² United States Government Accountability Office, *Conflict Minerals: Peace and Security in Democratic Republic of the Congo Have Not Improved with SEC Disclosure Rule* (2024)

⁷³ Domenico Carolei, 'Accountability beyond Corporations: The Applicability of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises to Non-profit Organisations' (2022) 13(1) Nonprofit Policy Forum
<<https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2020-0024>> accessed 25 March 2025

⁷⁴ 'Addressing the DRC Conflict: A Path to Peace' (*Search for Common Ground*, 14 February 2025)
<<https://www.sfcg.org/addressing-the-drc-conflict-a-path-to-peace/>> accessed 24 March 2025

in a deal presented in February 2025. The M23 leadership, however, dismissed any external interventions, citing suspicion regarding foreign involvement and emphasising the need for Congolese-driven solutions. This underlines how intricate local forces and international interests intersect, and how external interventions risk being perceived as exploitative, thereby bolstering opposition.⁷⁵

The instability in the DRC has broader regional implications. Neighbouring countries, particularly Rwanda and Uganda, which provide support to various rebel groups, have complicated peace efforts and raised concerns of a possible broader regional conflict. To prevent the violence from escalating further, the African Union and other regional bodies have to address these cross-border processes.⁷⁶

As a result of the DRC's strategic place in global supply chains for essential minerals, the world has an interest in the country. The world industry may be impacted by instability within the DRC, particularly in the areas of technology and alternative energy. Due to the global reliance upon Congolese resources, the international community must come together and stabilise the region for both economic and humanitarian purposes.⁷⁷

In the coming years, the DRC's prospects for peace hinge on the resolution of internal and external matters. Encouraging an inclusive government that addresses grievances of various political and ethnic groupings is key from within.

Open, equitable partnerships that prioritise the sovereignty of the DRC and the well-being of its people over the exploitation of resources are key from without. A holistic approach that involves security, economic, and regional cooperation is required for the path to peace. Despite the gigantic challenges, there is hope for a future when the DRC will be in a position to utilise its rich resources for the benefit of all its people and break the cycles of conflict that have long plagued the nation if Congolese leaders and the international community remain committed.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁶ Syed Salauddin Mahmud, 'DRC Crisis: Start of a Wider Regional Conflict?' (*Modern Diplomacy*, 13 February 2025) <<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/02/13/drc-crisis-start-of-a-wider-regional-conflict/>> accessed 24 March 2025

⁷⁷ *Ibid*