**JAEI ENVIRONMENTAL CORNER**

**International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict**

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| *"We must use all of the tools at our disposal, from dialogue and mediation to preventive diplomacy, to keep the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources from fuelling and financing armed conflict and destabilizing the fragile foundations of peace."**Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon* |  |

On November 5, 2001, the UN General Assembly declared November 6 of each year as the ***International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict*** (resolution 56/4). The assembly considered that that any environmental damage in times of armed conflict impairs ecosystems and natural resources long after the period of conflict. This damage can often extend beyond the limits of national territories and today’s generation. The assembly also recalled the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which emphasized the necessity of working to protect the environment.



*A major independent scientific assessment, released by the United Nations Environment Programme in 2011, shows that pollution from over 50 years of oil operations in the region has penetrated further and deeper than many may have supposed*

The International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict helps people understand more about war's effects on the environment.

Many people around the world, including government officials, scientists, journalists, educators, and business people, observe the UN’s International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict. Those who take part in the day spend time discussing about how the effects of war are damaging to the natural environment. They also work together to find ways to limit environmental destruction caused by armed conflict and war. People learn and share information about the dangers of new technologies in war such as depleted uranium ammunition, which poses unknown threats to the environment. People around the world are also made aware that all efforts must be taken to limit environmental destruction caused by conflict.

Though mankind has always counted its war casualties in terms of dead and wounded soldiers and civilians, destroyed cities and livelihoods, the environment has often remained the unpublicized victim of war. Water wells have been polluted, crops torched, forests cut down, soils poisoned, and animals killed to gain military advantage. War and armed conflict has many damaging effects on the natural environment. New technology that is used for war means that the destruction and damage of the environment is more serious and the long-term consequences can be worse. People succumb to illness as a result of military pollution of the environment by means of chemical gases, radioactive substances, fire and decomposition. There is a long-term pollution of the region by the wastes from military machinery. Huge amounts of air pollution are caused by military planes flying over a given region for thousands of hours … and the list goes on and on!

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has found that over the last 60 years, at least 40 percent of all internal conflicts have been linked to the exploitation of natural resources, whether high-value resources such as timber, diamonds, gold and oil, or scarce resources such as fertile land and water. Conflicts involving natural resources have also been found to be twice as likely to relapse.

The United Nations attaches great importance to ensuring that action on the environment is part of conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding strategies - because there can be no durable peace if the natural resources that sustain livelihoods and ecosystems are destroyed.

# http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/image/view/-/1492962/medRes/393310/-/maxw/600/-/9mk9ls/-/mine.jpgColtan and conflict in the DRC

The eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is extremely rich in Coltan *(Columbite-Tantalite)*, a rare metallic ore used for the production of electronic goods of mass consumption, such as mobile phones, laptops and videogame consoles, whose profits have fuelled the largest conflict in modern African history.

For over 10 years, companies in industrialized countries have purchased Coltan despite war and lawlessness in the DRC, and they became profitable sources of foreign currency for a multitude of state and non-state actors, including rebel forces, Rwandan and Ugandan governments (and their armies), licensed companies and poor communities with no employment opportunities.

The resulting power struggles over this valuable ore combined with the weakness of the Congolese state provoked conflict and political turmoil in the country. The war in the DRC has reached a level of complexity to the point that it has been renamed the “African World War,” having involved eight African nations and 25 rebel groups and caused the highest death toll since World War II.

Even though Coltan is not the only cause of the Congolese war, it has been a core problem with neighbouring countries, Rwanda in particular. It is also a major source of revenue for rebel groups such as the Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP - a Tutsi rebel group responsible for the North Kivu war in October 2008) and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) - a Hutu rebel group.

High market prices provoked the so-called Coltan Fever. Entire communities in the eastern DRC became involved in Coltan mining; students dropped out of schools; farmers and shepherds left their lands and livestock in favour of artisanal mining activities.

Easy profits also attracted the interests of a multitude of rebel groups, militia and armies, which started looting the area's mineral wealth.

Sadly the area in which this prized Coltan is found is shared by the critically endangered mountain gorilla which have also become casualties of this vicious armed struggle.

It is well known that countries rich in natural resources are often characterized by bad governance and corruption. However, in the DRC this "resource curse" has reached an extreme level of brutality, as the conflict has killed over 5 million people in the past 10 years. Finding sustainable strategies for the use of natural resources is the most important task for promoting peace in the DRC

Reports accusing over 100 western corporations of financing rebel groups and militias and therefore fuelling conflict were made known. NGOs and activist groups started campaigns against these companies and the news appeared in the media for the first time. As a result, many giant corporations such as Nokia, Samsung and Motorola published specific corporate policies against the use of Congolese Coltan and are today buying, at least officially, from other producers in Australia, Canada and few other countries

**What can we do?**

* **This bitter “Coltan conflict” is fuelled by OUR demands for** new technologies such as mobile phones and other electronic devices. Do we really need *that “very-latest-with-all-the-latest-bells-&-whistles-drop-dead-gorgeous”* cell phone? If we REALLY needed it – make really sure that the Coltan contained in it is from an ethical and no-conflict source!! - what is the manufacturer’s policy on this! – question them ruthlessly if necessary!
* On Friday, November 6, pray for our Environment in War & Armed Conflicts in the world, through the world peace.

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| God of wholeness, God of Grace,To you we bring our thanks and praise.To a world that searches - you are a lamp that shines,To a world that is hungry - you are food that sustains,To a world that suffers - you are hope of release,To a world that’s broken - you are one who restores,To a world full of hate - you are love that forgives,To a world that denies - you are truth that endures.To you we bring our thanks and praise,God of wholeness, God of Grace | This beautiful world can be cruel destroying life and livelihood in an instant,Challenging our faith in a God who cares.This beautiful world is yours, LordCreated in love, gifted by grace.Help us understand it; care for it; protect itAnd when disaster strikesBe there if not in person, then in prayer. |