

BLOOD DIAMONDS & CONGO BEAT

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Blood diamonds! That is what my trip Dec. 15`08 to Jan 5`09 to Kinshasa and especially to Goma, the war-torn area of North-Kivu and South-Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo evokes. And to diamonds you could add gold, copper, tungsten, uranium, cobalt, coltan, cassiterite, precious stones used to build our cell-phones and computers, rare but found in abundance in the East and North-East part of the DRC. Is it possible that in this day and age, the largest country of Africa, with 70 million inhabitants and with such an abundance of rich minerals people can be so poor? Hundreds of

orphans, thousands of undernourished children and emaciated women, jobless youth, people stricken with infectious diseases crowd the Carmelite Sisters medical dispensary and the Salesian compound surrounded by countless refugees. The UN mentions 2.5 million people terrorized by armed groups, raped and killed, chased from their villages without water, food or dwelling, to make room for armed mercenaries in search of precious minerals.

Who are these armed groups you may ask? Well! You have the 30 thousand or so genocidal soldiers who moved to the RDC from Rwanda in 1994 led by Laurent Nkunda. The group is called the CNDP (Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple) and dominates the scene. Cunning and ruthless and with an army of 4,000 to 7000 troops, supported by the Rwanda Government, replenished in combat arms with the complicity of the RDC army and financed by local and Rwandan businessmen who in turn do business with foreign countries like Belgium, Great Britain, Canada, China, France, Finland, Israël, Holland, the USA, South Africa, Switzerland, Dubai who all benefit from this largely illicit trade. (UN public report, 2002).

Another significant group is the FDLR (Fédération Démocratique de Libération du Rwanda) involved in clandestine mining operations mainly extracting cassiterite, gold, coltan and tungsten, which they sell to foreign companies, reeking benefits in the millions of dollars. These and maybe 40 more armed groups coming from neighboring



countries, some ethnic based, terrorize the whole of East and North-East DRC. The saying is: "You start a war here while I extract gold over there", which made the Congolese Bishops affirm in a December pastoral letter: *"there is no doubt at all that the greed of certain powers is feeding the violence imposed on the population; all conflicts take place in the mining corridors"*.

With an inept government, corrupt officials, an inefficient army and state apparatus, the DRC is unable to protect its citizens, defend its borders, or provide essential services such as proper roads, electricity, water and sewage facilities to the population. *The DRC, say the Bishops, is in desperate need of assistance from the International Community to dismantle the armed groups and sincerely re-establish order according to the constitutional law of the country recognized by international law.*

Church institutions meanwhile, provide education, medical dispensaries, social relief and give hope to people who otherwise would be in a totally hopeless situation. Church services also offer a reprieve from the drudgery of life or perhaps are the only place where one can feel safe, offering friendship and peace, and listening to words that give life and meaning to one's life. Churches are full, every service lasting 2 to 3 hours with electric organ and drum ensemble and boisterous church choirs with beautiful voices in harmony, sung in lingala while a dozen swaying acolytes, readers including the celebrant make the processional entrance or present the offerings at the altar. People praise God with heart, body and soul.

Pledging the Sunday collection on the feast of Epiphany to the Church of Africa, Pope Benedict XVI also asked the worldwide Church to do likewise. *"Africa needs our help and must not again be forgotten in this profoundly changing world. During this next decade, our efforts and our prayers must be sustained that an authentic hope may rise up in the hearts of the people of Africa"*.

For more resource:

- [Friends of the Congo- Washington Based](#)
- [The Enough Project](#)
- [Congo Global Coalition](#)