

Welcome to As It Is, from VOA Learning English! I'm Bob Doughty in Washington.

Today on the program, some nations are attempting to cut links between the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and eastern Congo's mineral exports. Later in the show, we hear what Western governments are doing to avoid fueling the unrest.

But first, researchers recently produced a map of mining areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The map shows mines under the control of the Congolese army and armed groups. The study suggests that the top "conflict mineral" in the area is now gold. Economics reporter Mario Ritter has more on the story.

Gold Increases in Importance as a Conflict Mineral in DRC

A Belgian group, the International Peace Information Service, carried out the study in partnership with the DRC registry of mines.

The researchers found that armed groups were involved in about 200 of the 800 mines they studied. The Congolese army was involved at 265 mines. The researchers reported that both the military and the militias are taxing mine workers illegally.

The International Peace Information Service carried out a similar survey in 2009. Filip Hilgert was the lead researcher. He told VOA the map they made four years ago is no longer correct. He said many of the miners are now digging for gold. And he said the armed groups are profiting much more from gold than from other conflict minerals, such as tin, tungsten and tantalum. These minerals are often called the "3Ts."

One reason for the change has been an increase in the price of gold. Another reason has been stronger international rules for mineral imports. The United States Congress passed legislation to fight the trade of conflict minerals. Mr. Hilgert says such efforts have had a big effect on trade in the 3Ts. But it has not affected the gold trade.

Judith Sargentini is a member of the European Parliament. She has been campaigning for a European law on conflict minerals. She notes that gold, like diamonds, is easy to transport in small amounts. That explains why it is hard to know where it was mined.

The German geological institute BGR has collected minerals from hundreds of mines in Rwanda. The collection could be used to prove whether a sample of minerals came from a conflict area. But, Judith Sargentini suggests that geophysical tests will not work. She says buyers need to know about their suppliers.

“You cannot solve every trade in commodity by trying to find out what the geological background of a material is. It shows that you need, first of all, a due diligence supply chain, and second of all, initiatives that lead to fair trade gold mining.”

Due diligence, in this case, means knowing and being able to trust your supplier.

You are listening to As It Is from VOA Learning English. Thanks for joining us today. I’m Bob Doughty.

Western Nations Act Against Conflict Minerals

Western governments want to cut links between the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and the area’s mineral exports.

Both the United States and the European Union have taken steps to tighten control of mineral imports to avoid fueling the conflict in eastern Congo.

Mario Ritter has more.

The United States Congress passed the Dodd Frank Act in 2010. The law deals mainly with financial rules. But it also includes a special requirement for American-listed companies. It says buyers of tin, tantalum, tungsten or gold need to show they have not supported conflict in Africa’s Great Lakes area.

Now the European Union is also writing a bill to prevent deals that help private armies in the eastern Congo. Judith Sargentini says the aim of the European law is to help break the link between the minerals trade and armed conflict. She suggests the law will require EU companies buying minerals to prove they were mined without supporting the conflict in the Congo.

“We cannot just have the U.S. work on the issue, where we are the bigger trading countries with Africa and ignore this. It will influence European companies that want to trade on the U.S. market, but besides that, more importantly, Europe has a responsibility towards a lot of countries that are actually even former colonies.”

She says the bill is not a reaction to an increase in Chinese imports of these minerals by companies that are not concerned about the Dodd Frank Act.

“But I would say that European communication on trade and raw materials, of course, is completely influenced by the fear that Europe has that China will buy out everything and we don’t have anything in the future anymore”

Judith Sargentini says the American law reduced trade and jobs. She notes that the proposed law will not stop imports from eastern Congo. She says some imports will continue even if the minerals were mined under what she called bad circumstances.

Critics say the Dodd Frank Act stopped trade and led to the illegal transport of minerals through nearby countries. Ms. Sargentini agrees but says the planned law should have a different effect. She says the EU trade commissioner wants to increase trade with the Congo. She says the law will reward businesses that make an effort to trade minerals fairly and openly.

Some Congolese experts say they think the Dodd Frank Act has helped to cut the flow of money to militia leaders. In eastern Congo, workers at the Enough Project say people have changed behaviors because of it, but the conflict minerals part of the law has yet to be enforced.

And that is As It Is. I'm Bob Doughty. Be listening again tomorrow for another program from VOA Learning English.

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