
Congo, Democratic Republic: The looting war

Front-page articles in mainstream newspapers and magazines have pictured Congo's crisis along the "preconceived notion of the 'savage,' 'depraved' African", said Maurice Carney and Carrie Crawford, from Friends of the Congo (FOTC), in their article "Casualties in the Scramble for Congo's Resources" (at http://friendsofthecongo.org/commentaries/congo_casualties.php). In doing so, "the leading media institutions of the west are complicit in one of the most well documented resource heist of the 20th century and which persists at the dawn of the 21st century."

The authors rightly recall that "The conflict resulting in brutal rapes and ghastly killings are inextricably linked to the looting of the Congo" and that "A lot of the blame for the persistent climate of conflict is often laid on the Hutu militia who fled Rwanda in 1994 pursuant to the genocide in that country. In fact this is just a part of the story, which does not give a complete picture. It is instructive to note that, for all intents and purposes, Rwanda controlled the east of the Congo from 1996 – 2002, a period in which they claimed to be in hot pursuit of the Hutu genocidaires known as the Interhamwe. However during that period, Rwanda's most noted military clash was with Uganda inside the Congo. The source of the clash was over who would control vast diamond concessions in Kinsangi, hundreds of miles away from where the dreaded Hutu genocidaires were situated. Hence, although the Hutu presence in the Congo is an issue, it falls far short of explaining the source of the violence and crimes in the Congo."

The article points out that "As humanitarian groups seek resources to care for the sexually violated and brutalized women and children of the Congo, they should start with those companies that are lined up to purloin billions from Congo's wealth while 80 percent of Congolese live on less than 30 cents per day. Coexisting with the orgy of rapes and killing is what one corporate magnate calls a party. Gerhard Kemp of the Rand Merchant Bank, of Johannesburg, SA is quoted saying 'The Congo is so rich in mineral wealth, you can't just ignore it. You don't want to be the last guy at this party.'"

The article also quotes a 2007 International Crisis Group report saying that "the U.S., Canada, South Africa and Belgium took the lead in seeking to control strategic reserves of copper, cobalt and other minerals and restrict China's access" and that "the U.S. ambassador's public celebration of Phelps-Dodge's [now Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold] acquisition of the Tenke-Fungurume concessions in Katanga in August 2005 and the grandiose June 2006 ceremony in Kolwezi marking the reopening of the Kamoto mine, attended by Belgian, EU, Canadian, French, Angolan and even UN representatives", revealed the main economic interest of Western diplomatic corps allegedly in the Congo to assist a democratic process.

It is worth reproducing a comment from a Congolese reader in Los Angeles regarding the news of a visit paid by Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc.'s CEO to President Joseph Kabila: "Just reinforces what people have said all along about Joseph Kabila; he's only interested in mining companies. The mining companies may bring jobs, may give a little money to the community, but when the sun goes down the only thing the mining companies care about is their shareholders. Joseph Kabila will make sure those shareholders are kept happy while the Congolese that need the

same consideration and protection languish in extermination in eastern Congo.” (see at http://www.eacourier.com/articles/2007/10/29/local_news/doc47228e6172be8078788651.txt)

According to Global Witness, the deal resulted “in Congo owning only 17.5% of its own resources and being in such position that it may even not get any profits from the deal. Nonetheless, the United States government agency, Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) has provided risk insurance for a \$1 billion investment project by Freeport-McMoRan.”

The FOTC article deplores that “[a]s a result of the high stakes in Congo’s resources, the Congolese people are fighting against enormous odds. The die is literally being set now for a continued impoverishment of Congolese for several generations. The odious contracts will be in place for 30 to 40 years and will be backed by international law. The World Bank established the Mining and Forestry guidelines in the Congo as early as 2002. These guidelines were fixed on a neo-liberal model, which calls for the selling off of the country’s wealth to private interests”.

FOTC’s article warns: “We may look at what is taking place in the Congo and cringe or cover our eyes but the unsightly picture that is often left out or obfuscated, especially by the mainstream media, is the significant role of the corporations that provide us with our cell phones, game consoles, lap tops and other modern technological devices which benefit from Congo’s woes.”

The authors conclude, “[s]hould the global community play a constructive role in the Congo, the Congolese people will take care of the rest and produce leaders who represent their interests by bringing reconciliation, justice and prosperity to this vital country in the heart of Africa.”

Article based on “Casualties in the Scramble for Congo’s Resources”, by Maurice Carney and Carrie Crawford, FOTC, December 17 , 2007, e-mail: info@friendsofthecongo.org, http://friendsofthecongo.org/commentaries/congo_casualties.php