

Hope for an End to the World's Deadliest War John Prendergast CNN 22 February 2013

(...) On Sunday, the Democratic Republic of Congo and other African states are due to sign a framework agreement that aims to build a foundation for regional peace.

That so many African states -- along with the United Nations, African Union, European Union and United States -- are uniting in an effort to address the roots of conflict in Congo is an encouraging development. The signing of this framework deal doesn't end the war in Congo, but rather it provides a starting point for a global effort to try to end finally the world's deadliest conflict.

Four important changes are under way in Congo today, giving this initiative a better chance than its predecessors. First, for decades all of the benefits of eastern Congo's vast mineral resource wealth have gone to those with the biggest guns (PDF) -- the Congolese army, local militias or neighboring countries. These minerals include, among others, gold, cobalt, copper, tin, industrial diamonds and coltan, used in cell phones, laptops and other electronic devices.

But U.S. and European consumer demands for a conflict-free minerals trade, congressional legislation, International Monetary Fund aid suspensions, U.N. experts' reports, responsible investors and other influential voices are making it harder to profit violently and illegally from mineral smuggling.

Second, regional support for armed groups inside eastern Congo has been a staple of the ongoing cycle of war there for years. For the first time, the international community is imposing meaningful consequences for evidence of cross-border weapons supply. Rwanda strenuously denies involvement, but some donors have suspended aid programs to that nation and will continue to do so until the evidence shifts toward solutions.

Third, until recently, accountability for war crimes wasn't part of the discussion despite some of the worst crimes against humanity being committed globally since World War II. But calls for international justice have intensified inside Congo and beyond, and accused war criminals are beginning to face sanctions.

Fourth, calls for the reform of a U.N. peacekeeping mission that costs more than \$1 billion are increasing. Refocusing the mission on eradicating the worst armed groups, demobilizing rank-and-file combatants and helping to reform Congo's army would go much further than the present mandate. Africa has pledged 4,000 new combat troops to deal with the worst militias, and change can start with them.(...)

A soon-to-be-named U.N. "super envoy" should help construct a comprehensive peace process for Congo and its neighbors, building on the upcoming framework. (...) Two tracks seem necessary. One would involve an impartially facilitated national dialogue to address internal Congolese issues such as army and justice reform, decentralization, electoral frameworks, immigration, minority protections, land dispute adjudication, mining codes and other divisive issues. The other would be a regional process in which Congo and its neighbors could address shared security threats and negotiate cooperative investment and infrastructure arrangements that could ignite a real economic boom for Central Africa.(...)

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Framework Agreement

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