

Coalition for a Conflict-Free St Andrews gets the go ahead

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Following reports of an unprecedented increase of violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) recently, the Coalition for a Conflict-free St Andrews has achieved a major step in making the University of St Andrews' campus conflict-free. Having had continuous meetings with the University's Principal, Louise Richardson, as well as the former President of the Student Association, Patrick O'Hare, the Coalition has succeeded in encouraging the University of St Andrews to add a clause about conflict minerals in its procurement policy, and has become the 2nd university, after Clark University, to do so.

This achievement is extremely notable, with Bennett Collins, a STAND member and Coalition for a Conflict-Free St Andrews activist, recently stating to The Saint: "This is a major landmark for the Conflict-Free Campus Initiative. We are the 11th institution in the world to do something about conflict minerals, we are the 2nd institution besides Clark University to incorporate conflict minerals into its procurement policy, and we are the first to show that this initiative can be done outside the North American academic system."

University Quaestor and Factor Derek Watson has informed the Coalition that he would: "...include questions relating to conflict materials and supply chain details for relevant commodities within the Sustainability Criteria that are already included within the University's procurement processes..." Furthermore, he thanked the Coalition for bringing the until-then ignored issue to his attention, and added: "The commitments we are making represent the start of the journey, through which we anticipate, in time, progress will be made."

Patrick O'Hare has additionally arranged for the Ethics and Environment Officer to meet with the Procurement Office bi-monthly to ensure this policy is implemented. This is another positive step for the Coalition who did not wish to see a one-off promise which was never realised, but instead a progressive agreement and collaboration between University staff.

The DRC conflict has largely been fuelled by the misuse of 'blood minerals' such as columbite-tantalite, or coltan, that are copiously used in modern technology such as mobile phones and laptops, and whose mining results in many deaths because of warlords owning these mines and trading with many European and US-based Multinational Companies (MNCs). The Saint reported at the beginning of May that the MNCs' blatant disregard for basic human rights, such as the working conditions of miners, coupled with trading with known warlords, has immensely exasperated the Congolese conflict. See [here](#) for more information about the talk held on Tuesday 24th April.

Of late, the situation on the ground is becoming intolerable for millions of people. *The Guardian* reported at the end of May that the number of displaced people in the DRC is now estimated at an incredibly high 2 million people, with feuding warlords sending militia into villages which has resulted in a mass exodus of helpless citizens caught up in the violence. It also reported that at least 60 women were raped during June by Congolese rebels in the eastern DRC during a 2-day attack on defenceless villages; the DRC has now been dubbed the world's rape capital.

Collins said in response to this recent news: "...the Congo has once again taken a back seat in the 24 hour news cycle and it's hard to comprehend why. Thousands of refugees are fleeing the Congo and Uganda is

sending Congolese refugees back into the Congo, violating refugee law and the statute of ‘non-refoulement.’... These recent events in the eastern DRC are atrocious and deserve the attention of everyone who believes in one human race. I check the BBC daily and had no impression that this [conflict] was their priority. Nowhere else in the world is this level of violence seen and ignored.”

The Coalition plans to go from strength to strength in the next academic year, with their summer constituting of organising events including speakers, art exhibitions, balloon launches and: “...potentially, a Conference on the Conflict in the Congo.” Excitingly, Collins has contacted Bandi Mbubi, an anti-conflict campaigner: “Bandi Mbubi, a speaker from the 2012 TEDxExeter (you can find his speech ‘Congo Calling’ on youtube) has been in contact with us about his new campaign coincidentally also called ‘Congo Calling.’

“My hope is that we can get a speaking tour going for Bandi amongst Scottish Universities to spread awareness on the Congo and launch CFCI at a couple of other British universities. We’re also working with AEGIS Students to try to get CFCI on their agenda for the next year. So basically, we have a lot to do!” He added.