

Coalition for a conflict-free St Andrews relauches

On Wednesday, 17 October, the Coalition for a Conflict-free St Andrews teamed up with Amnesty International and Oxfam to further publicise and raise funds for their cause, and saw many braving the bad weather in support of it.

October 23, 2012 3:57 pm [0 comments](#) [Sunniva Davies-Rommetveit](#)



On Wednesday 17 October the Coalition for a Conflict-free St Andrews teamed up with Amnesty International and Oxfam to further publicise and raise funds for their cause, and saw many braving the bad weather in support of it.

The Coalition's main goal is to prevent the University of St Andrews from purchasing electrical products from companies who source 'conflict minerals', such as coltan, from areas with poor human rights records and civil wars, as is the case in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

It was the Coalition's relaunch for this academic year after an extremely successful launch last year, where, following numerous Coalition meetings with Principal Louise Richardson, the University of St Andrews became the second university, after Clark University, to include a clause about conflict minerals in its procurement policy.

The day itself was a success, and attendance remained high, despite poor weather affecting some events. Easing into the five events held in total, hot chocolate and stickers for laptops and mobiles were sold outside the university library to raise funds.

As Bennett Collins, Coalition President, said of the sticker sale: "We sold approximately two hundred of our campaign's new stickers designated for our phones and computers, saying 'I want to be Conflict-Free' and we managed to raise some funds thanks to the volunteers who decided to brave the cold and sit outside the library throughout the day."

There was also a symbolic show of support for the plight of the Congolese people with the creation of a human yellow star on the Lower College Lawn, which Collins described as representative of "...a radiant future for Congo..." Unfortunately, the weather battered the campaigners so the Facebook event's 46

attendants was, in reality, noticeably lower.

Another event was the Amnesty letter writing campaign to MEP David Martin, described by Claire Birnie, Oxfam Society President and Education Coordinator of the Coalition, as productive. She stated that they would be : “...excited to hear back from him soon.”

The evening saw a talk given by Professor Mario Aguillar, a senior advisor to the British Courts on asylum cases from the DRC and the Royal African Society Representative to St Andrews, and was attended by approximately 40 people.

Owing to technical difficulties, the video viewing which had meant to be included with the event, could not be shown. However, this gave more time for increased discussion and debate about the issues surrounding problems in the DRC. When asked how the Coalition could hope to make a difference to a country that has been persistently dubbed “rape capital of the world”, Professor Aguillar said: “Your role is very important; it raises awareness. I’ve seen a difference made by students before when eradicating South African apartheid, it can be done.”

Collins summarised the day’s ambitions with these words: “I do believe that the Congo is the South Africa of our generation. In our day and age, we’re so interconnected that we really don’t have an excuse not to care.”

When asked what the Coalition’s future plans would be after the successful re-launch, Collins explained: “... we are planning to focus a lot of energy on spreading the Conflict-Free Campus Initiative throughout the UK (and maybe Europe!). I’ve spent three of the four past weekends travelling to Glasgow and London meeting with student groups and organisations in order to further our cause.”

“At the moment, we have six universities on our radar that are in the planning stages of CFCI. Our second goal is centering our advocacy efforts on getting MEPs to begin legislation on transparent sourcing from companies within the EU and getting them to implement legislation that’s already in place regarding conflict minerals and unethical sourcing,” he said.