Computer Chips for Cell Phones Fuel War in Congo

Tantalum (also called coltan) is used in cell phones and computer chips produced by companies like Intel, Nokia and Ericsson. The Congo holds 80% of the world’s coltan reserves, 60% of world’s cobalt and the majority of the world’s high grade copper.

Wealthy western corporations have fueled the “conflict” some call Africa’s World War in order to gain access to coltan. The war, which involves troops from Congo, Rwanda, Angola, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Namibia has killed 3 million people since 1999. Most Congolese tantalum comes from rebel-controlled coltan mines. The rebels use hunger and brutality to force local people, including children, to work in the mines. The coltan mining has also destroyed the rain forest and endangered local wildlife including already threatened gorillas.

The west’s demand for coltan is similar to its desire for diamonds. Both have little value for African people, but their mining and sale have brought chaos, corruption and death. Recently, diamonds have fueled wars in Sierra Leone, Angola and Liberia.

The Congo’s vast mineral riches have subjected the country to both the US and Belgium’s violent greed. In 1960 the Congo got independence after 100 years of brutal Belgian rule. The new prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, planned to return the country’s natural resources to the people. But in 1961 Belgian soldiers, with the help of the CIA and an order from Eisenhower, executed and mutilated Lumumba and his ministers.

The CIA put Dictator Mobutu in power. He ruled for 30 years and handed out the Congo’s mineral rights to foreign multi-national companies. In exchange Mobutu received a personal fortune of billions of dollars. The US also shipped $400 million in arms and military training to Mobutu. After Mobutu was overthrown, the US transferred its military aid to Rwanda and Uganda rebels who invaded the Congo.

Corporate demand for mineral resources continues to drive the Congo conflict. The World Bank and the IMF contribute to the war by praising Rwanda and Uganda for increasing their gross domestic products by illegally mining the Congo’s resources.

*Info from Dollars and Sense & Guerilla News Network (guerrillanews.com)*