

The Heart of Bleakness

Sifting Through the Wreckage of the Congo's Conflict Economy

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URL: <http://www.vice.com/vice-news/the-vice-guide-to-congo-4>. Length: 8:55 min.

URL: <http://www.vice.com/vice-news/the-vice-guide-to-congo-5>. Length: 11:41 min

Key words: Democratic Republic of Congo, Mai Mai, conflict minerals

SUMMARY

This documentary combines the story of a journalist seeking to understand the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the highly complex situation he ultimately uncovers. In Parts 4 and 5 of the series, the journalist goes deep into the jungle to interview a [Mai Mai](#) leader. The Mai Mai General and his fighters talk openly about their motivations for fighting and reveal conflicting loyalties. (During the Congolese civil war, the Mai Mai were village defense groups, but today some Mai Mai militias are themselves vicious rebel groups.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This Mai Mai militia says its goal is to protect the Congo from foreigners, but it has a reputation of committing terrible acts of violence against local villagers and this documentary shows them cooperating with the Rwandan [FDLR](#) rebel group. What do you think motivates the men in the video to join the Mai Mai?
2. The Mai Mai say “foreigners” are running the Congo and want all “Rwandans” out of the country. They say the President of the Congo and others Congolese who speak Banyarwanda as their native language are “[foreigners](#)”—even those who have been in the Congo for more than half a century. How should we decide who is Congolese and who not? Is the Mai Mai goal to evict Banyarwanda-speakers a form of ethnic cleansing?
3. The journalist says the international demand for conflict-free electronics is causing corporations to pull out of the Congo, leaving this poor country even poorer. He also suggests that banning conflict minerals will not make the rebels groups disappear. What do you think? Should we support a ban on conflict minerals?
4. How do you feel about this style of documentary-making in which the journalists themselves are a key part of the story? Is it better than traditional documentaries in which we only see the subject? Worse? Just different?

QUICK FACTS

Became a Belgium colony: 1908

Declared independence: 1960

Population: 72 million (July 2011 est.)

Second Congolese War (1996-2003): 9 countries participated; more than 5 million Congolese died.

Main exports: gold, copper, cobalt, diamonds, petroleum, wood, coffee

GDP per capita: US \$300

Official Language: French

Widely spoken languages: Lingala, Kingwana (Kiswahili), Kikongo, Tshiluba

Religion: Catholic 50%, Protestant 20%, Kimbanguise 10%, Muslim 10%

Literacy: men - 81%; women - 54%.

LEARN MORE

[“Giving Congo's child soldiers a second chance.”](#) Irish Times (Jan 12, 2012)

[“DR Congo: MSF resumes work in town emptied by conflict.”](#) MSF (March 7, 2012)

[“DR Congo: Arrest Candidate Wanted for Mass Rape.”](#) Human Rights Watch (Nov 2, 2011)

[“UN Mission Hails New Strategy to Defeat Congo Militia Groups.”](#) Voice of America (Jan 31, 2012)

[“Eastern Congo’s Armed Groups.”](#) Enough Project

[“The FDLR suffer another blow and launch reprisals.”](#) Congo Siasa blog (Jan 14, 2012)



[\[Detailed map of the DR Congo\]](#)

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