

SIMULATION COMMITTEE GUIDE

HRC



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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Presidents' Letter

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to CCBMUN XXI! We are honoured to be your presidents this year. Our names are Antonia Orjuela and Lucia Rodríguez and we are 10th grade students from Colegio Bolivar. This is our second year as presidents together, and we are really excited to have you as our delegates. We have been in MUN since 5th grade as runners, 6th grade as delegates, and 9th grade as presidents. We have always had amazing teamwork, and we plan to work as well as we can to ensure that your experience in the model is not only enjoyable but educational. Our goal is to have a dynamic committee in which the topics discussed are debated to their full potential, where delegates reach viable and creative solutions to the problem at hand, and where delegates are able to improve their debating skills. We want to make this a safe space where all delegates feel comfortable speaking and taking on their country's role.

To us, MUN is a prime example of how delegates can show their analytic, argumentative, leadership, public speaking, research, and leadership skills on a topic of great importance to our society. Through MUN, participants learn about politics, diplomacy, geography, conflicts, society, health, history, economics, and pretty much everything else that affects the world we live in. Thanks to the models, delegates are able to challenge themselves by having to take on the roles of characters and perspectives that might not be their own. In this way, they are able to open their minds to new opinions and take into account opposing views. This is exactly what we expect, and we would like to remind all of you that you are not here to voice your own opinion and stance regarding global conflicts but to represent the ideas of a nation. We have carefully selected these topics because we believe that they are relevant to our society and because they will allow us to create a significant and engaging debate.

We expect you to come prepared and with the best attitude to make this first model for many the best we can. Apart from this, we also want to highlight the importance of embracing a positive and respectful attitude towards others to ensure this model is enjoyable to all. We are committed to helping you in every way possible and are enormously excited to have this committee. We sincerely hope this will be as much of a fun and memorable experience for you as it will be for us, and we plan to make this committee the best possible. Please do not hesitate to contact us; we are very willing to guide you along this path. We are looking forward to seeing you there and cannot wait to meet you!

Your presidents,

Antonia and Lucia (HRC Chair)

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Simulation topic: *Exploitation of Workers in Cobalt Mines in the DRC*

I. History/Context

Cobalt compounds have been used for centuries to apply a rich blue colour to glass, ceramics, and other craftwork. Traces of the material have been found in Egyptian sculptures, Persian jewelry, in the ruins of Pompeii, and at many other sites across the world. However, the discovery of cobalt didn't happen until the 1700s when Swedish chemist, Georg Brandt, discovered the metal. This was the first metal to be discovered since prehistory.

Mining of cobalt first started during the 16th century in Norway, Hungary, and Sweden. With the discovery of cobalt deposits in the French colony of New Caledonia, in 1864, the production of cobalt in European countries decreased. Later, deposits were discovered in Ontario, Canada, in 1904. The largest deposit was found in the province of Katanga in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1914. In 1978, there was an internal conflict, the Shaba conflict, which almost stopped the production of cobalt in the Katanga province, but the impact was smaller than expected due to new cobalt recycling techniques that were being used in the industry.

Cobalt mining in the DRC Cobalt is an essential mineral in the technology industry for the production of ion batteries. These are the batteries that are used in the construction of smartphones, laptops, and many other technological gadgets. Most of the mining operations for this mineral can be found in Katanga province, south of the capital, Kinshasa. 63% of the world's cobalt is extracted from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), of which 65-85% is mined by large multinational corporations from copper mines, which are strictly controlled by local governments and organisations.

The remaining 35-15% of cobalt comes from artisanal mining, which is often done under terrible working conditions. Women and children can often be found among the workers in these small mining operations. Although this practice is illegal in the DRC, many large-scale



technology companies buy cobalt without investigating the working conditions of the people who mined the ore. Often these companies buy the cobalt without any precise knowledge of how it was extracted, due to the fact that it is often too difficult to trace it back to the source.

II. Current Situation

Currently, the situation in the DRC is far from perfect. To date, there are no estimates on how many Congolese workers have died in accidents related to unregulated mining. Subcontractors have also posed a big threat in recent years; according to one study, over 63% of the workforce contracted to work in cobalt extraction earn extremely low wages - far less than the local living wage. Subcontracting has also been used by corporations to save costs. However, the corporations do not monitor the conditions under which these sub-contracted employees are working.

One corporation which has been at the centre of many accusations is Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt, which is a Chinese mining corporation accused of human rights violations. The revelation of several of these abuses prompted Apple to stop buying cobalt from this corporation (Marketplus, 2018). Reports have also surfaced of racism and verbal violence in the Chinese-owned mines, where it quickly became a very tense environment. Many other corporations have been found to be profiting from child labour according to a report made by Amnesty International. One plant manager was quoted as saying "... the government doesn't provide money for schools, so parents send their children to the mines instead" (Davie, 2022).

There have also been reports of corruption by government officials, which has had a negative effect on the current situation in the DRC. This lack of enforcement by the local government has also posed a problem for the big technology companies, since they have great trouble tracking the source and production of the cobalt they are buying for their own industry. Mining cobalt has also had a toll on the environment, with locals reporting poisoning of water and food supplies that have led to birth defects and respiratory diseases.



Cobalt has quickly become an essential mineral in our daily lives, and it is critical for green energy policies all around the world. Steps are being taken by big companies to ensure their supply of cobalt is socially and environmentally responsible. For example, companies like Tesla, Volkswagen and BMW have started initiatives to ensure their cobalt supply comes from sustainable sources.

Although in recent years there has been a great push for sustainable cobalt production, there are still many cases in which human rights are being violated at sites in the DRC. Mining and mineral exports account for 90% of the DRC's economy and are, therefore, essential for its survival. Artisanal mining employs 100,000 to 200,000 people and many others also benefit from the income that cobalt brings. Cobalt mining also provides a great opportunity for development if responsible practices can be established.

III. Key points of the debate

- Working conditions in artisanal cobalt mines
- Lack of accountability when subcontracting in cobalt mines
- Abuses at mining sites of large corporations
- Profiting from child labour by large international corporations
- Ensuring that cobalt is produced sustainably in the DRC

IV. Guiding questions

1. Does your country export cobalt? If so, is it an important part of your country's economy?
2. Does your country import cobalt? If so, what is it used for, and is it an important part of your country's economy?
3. If your country exports cobalt, does it have any regulations to ensure that it is ethically produced?
4. If your country imports cobalt, does it have any regulations to ensure that it is



ethically sourced?

5. Does your country import cobalt from, or have any connections with the mining of cobalt in the DRC?
6. How can your delegation help regulate the mining of cobalt in the DRC?

V. Bibliography

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