

**PRESS RELEASE SENT TO RELEVANT NAMED JOURNALISTS AT 9 UK & INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ORGANISATIONS ON JANUARY 7 2024.**

You will be aware that much commentary on the violent situation in the east of DRC refers to "the 120 armed groups operating in the east".

This frequently leads to an implication that, because there are 120 armed groups operating in this area, there is no need to look further at what is happening. This implication is based on a historic racist trope that "the Congolese are always killing each other", that Congolese life is cheap, and therefore there is nothing more to be said.

Our organisation has commissioned research from a trusted team in Bukavu, eastern DRC, to analyse the nature of each of these armed groups. We enclose the detailed "cartography" of this work, which is a snapshot of the situation on November 23 2023. It covers the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika, which border Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania respectively.

In summary, it is clear that all the local armed groups were formed to protect themselves from violence and from the occupation of their land.

Rwanda and Uganda invaded this area of DRC in October 1996, driving Rwandan refugees from the huge camps on the border to most of their deaths at Kisangani, and elsewhere further west (as vividly documented in Thierry Michel's film *The Empire of Silence*). This illegal invasion was the catalyst for local populations to form armed groups to protect themselves from violence and from the occupation of their land. In the absence of adequate protection - to this day - from the Congolese army (FARDC), they had, and have no choice. And because of this lack of care by the Congolese government, any number of external armed groups are also now involved, including the Rwanda-backed M23 (as indicated in the latter section of the Cartography).

The other crucial element in this appalling situation is that from 1996, mobile phones were being developed in the Global North, needing cassiterite, gold and the so-called 3T minerals - tungsten, tin and tantalum (the latter extracted from coltan). Now widely known as conflict minerals. The First and Second Congo Wars (October 1996 to

May 1997, and August 1998 to July 2003) were funded by the value of these conflict minerals to the Global North, adding terrible fuel to the fire of armed violence in the east of DRC. The armed groups that have emerged throughout the past 27 years are significantly in response to this modern unregulated pillage of DRC's rich resources - the latest iteration of a pattern of pillage repeated so often since King Leopold's colonial rule. And, as you know, the largest external armed group, the M23, runs a regular mineral smuggling route to Rwanda worth \$1 billion per year.

It is essential that this context is given any time a mention is made of "120 armed groups in the east of DRC". We rely on you, at .....(name of organisation included here), to lead the way in changing the mindset with which eastern DRC is viewed. The Cartography is open source information, and you are welcome to use it as you see fit.