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African Union

Topic: Preventing the use of illegally extracted natural resources by violent groups

Director: TBD

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I. Committee Background

The African Union (AU) was established in 2002 by order of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which had recognized the need for an intergovernmental body that would help bring about continent-wide cooperation and solidarity since 1999. In the 2002 Durban Summit, after a series of previous conferences which had established the design and structure of the organization; the African Union held its first assembly of the Heads of State of the African Union. Since its genesis, the African Union's main purpose has been to foster a sense of continental cooperation and development. The organization focuses on protecting African nation's rights to sovereignty, promoting peace, democracy and human rights throughout the continent, and accelerating the political and socio-economic development of the continent as a whole.

The organization is composed of 54 African states, and consists of various organs, among which are the Assembly, the Executive Council, and the Peace and Security Council. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government is the organization's major organ: all 54 states are equally represented by their heads of state or appropriate representatives. The Executive Council, which is responsible to the Assembly, is composed of ministers appointed by their heads of state. The Executive Council is responsible for creating the Assembly's agenda and determining which issues need priority. The Peace and Security Council has 15 member states and is responsible for taking quick, executive decisions regarding violence related threats and addressing possible conflicts through diplomatic means. Other important organs include: the Parliamentary Parliament, the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council, and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.

II. Introduction

Description and Definition of the Topic

Africa is considered a resource-rich continent with a lot of economic potential. Yet, as the United Nations (UN) has pointed out, this natural wealth fails to become beneficial for all citizens; instead, it has become the subject of violence and conflict. Nations such as Sierra

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Leone, Liberia, South Africa, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Nigeria have experienced resource-fuelled conflict –internal armed struggles which are initiated or prolonged by the illicit exploitation of natural resources. In many cases, rebel militias within countries rely on illicit exploitation to finance their operations against governmental forces, oftentimes involving civilian populations in exploitative operations. In addition to political instability and violence, this causes a severe humanitarian crisis. Civilians are coerced into working in exploitation operation sites, under terrible and dangerous conditions. Children are common victims of these operations.

The problem, however, becomes much larger when the economy and social development of a nation is brought into consideration. The illicit exploitation of natural resources on behalf of terrorist groups and militias renders countries unable to use those resources for their own economic growth and development. Moreover, this problem also blocks the wealth from being distributed among the nations' people. Thus, the issue of resource extraction is multi-faceted, having political, humanitarian, and economic components (Downey et al., 2010; Giambrone, 2009; *Natural Resource Wealth ... Council 2013*).

The Problem

Blood resources have proven to be a very challenging issue for multiple nations in the African continent. The reason for this is that the problem is deeply rooted in various socio-political factors, and is cyclic in nature. Africa is an incredibly resource-rich continent, something that has proven to be both a blessing and a curse for the region. While the nations in the continent have the potential of becoming prominent forces in the international resource market, the lack of political stability that plagues most of its nations hinders it severely; coveted minerals thus become a curse as they fall prey to the hands of militias and guerrillas. Resources such as gold, diamonds, and oil have been the causes of incredible amounts of violence and humanitarian crisis, seeing as militia movements often turn to their exploitation in order to fuel illicit operations. There is an important economic effect, seeing as these resources, which could be used to bring money into the country, are instead used to fuel political struggles and expand rebel or militia territorial control.

Yet, one of the most troubling and urgent effects of this issue is the humanitarian crisis that ensues. Oftentimes, civilians are caught up in the exploitative operations of militias, forced to work in terrible conditions without access to proper healthcare or basic necessities. Children are especially vulnerable to the brutalities of coerced labor, seeing as they are an easy, cheap, and often times very complacent labor force; young girls often end up as prostitutes for the guerrillas.

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The inhumane conditions of many of these operations fuel the ambient of instability and political marginalization, which in turn makes it even harder for national governments to intervene.

One of the most important aspects of this issue is its cyclical nature. The problem is birthed from political instability and a government's inability to fully protect all its citizens, something that can be partly attributed to the marginalization and poverty endemic to many developing nations. The issue is catalyzed by rebel or militia movements reacting to political instability. These groups then take control of resources and use the money obtained from them to expand their influence and control, instigating even more political instability in regions that had not experienced strong governance to begin with. Basically, the more income militias obtain from illegally exploiting resources, the easier it becomes for them to continue to do so (Downey et al., 2010). The committee must keep the multifaceted nature of this issue in mind. Its solution should incorporate the problem's social, economic, and political effects.

III. History of the Topic

Chronological History of the Topic

The deviation of the fortune of African natural resources has fueled conflict and corruption in various African nations for the past few decades. In the last 30 years, the fight for resources has instigated wars in nations such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the DRC. Between 1992 and 2001 the amount of armed conflicts outside African territory decreased a staggering 50%, while Africa's conflict rate remained constant. This issue is mainly caused by the immense economic rewards that the exploitation and distribution of abundant natural resources has on militia groups. The issue also arose after market demands for precious elements such as Tantalum (Ta) and Niobium (Nb) grew exponentially. Their prices predictably skyrocketed after they were used for the production of video cameras, laptops, and other electronic devices that required capacitors. The demand for Tantalum rose in the 1990s but had an extremely notable surge of 38% after the start of the millenia. The DRC, one of Africa's richest nations in terms of minerals and natural resources, has seen a vast increase in the amount of violence resulting from illicitly extracted resources over the last century.

In the year 2000, a Panel of Experts was established to analyze and investigate any illegal activity regarding the extraction of resources in the DRC. This Panel encouraged the DRC to govern and better control their natural resources. After its establishment, the MONUSCO/MONUC, a branch of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO), was created in 2008 in the DRC with the purpose of tackling the issue using military force. However, this military use was limited to dealing with unlawful trade activity and armed conflicts only.

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Similarly, from 1989 to 1997, the Liberian Civil War unfolded into a catastrophic event that left millions dead. Rebel groups in the nation were fueled economically through the illegal extraction of precious minerals and other resources such as diamonds and timber (*Natural Resource Wealth ... Council 2013*). The result was the ongoing conflict that ended the lives of millions of innocent people in the country, and millions more displaced within the country or fleeing it.

In 2007, the Security Council met to emphasize the help of peacekeepers with the goal of preventing the illegal exploitation of natural resources, an action that in most countries proved to be effective. Peacekeepers were sent only in extreme cases where the nation was in need of help and at the peak of the problem.

Historical Case Studies

Nigeria-Cameroon Conflict

A conflict emerged between Nigeria and Cameroon after they both fought to gain possession of the Bakassi Peninsula, an oil-rich peninsula located in the Gulf of Guinea. From military aggressions to tribal squabbles, the struggle for this peninsula was non-stop, causing lots of damage in each of the countries. Countless lives were lost, places destroyed, and human rights violated. After incessant fighting for a couple of months, the Cameroonian government decided to put an end to the situation. They filed a lawsuit on March 24, 1994 at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to expel Nigeria from the region to prevent them from claiming sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula. Cameroon felt this lawsuit would give them a clear advantage over this situation, and it did. On October 10, 2002, to the shock of the Nigerian government, the ICJ ruled in favor of Cameroon, giving them complete control over the Bakassi Peninsula. Even after the ruling, Nigerian troops remain near the area and military tensions continue to emerge. Even some guerrilla and rebel groups began to involve themselves in this issue, as if to “help solve it” (Senan, 2002).

Sierra Leone Civil War

The Sierra Leone civil war began in 1991 with the seizing of northern towns by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The RUF, led by ex-military men and composed of individuals from both Sierra Leone and Liberia, was financially backed by Charles Taylor, the 22nd Liberian president. The Liberian government lent the RUF monetary and logistical support, but the RUF’s largest source of revenue was its illicit diamond trade (Jang, 2012). The RUF took charge of multiple diamond mines in Sierra Leone’s north, coercing the civilian population into becoming a workforce. The RUF was known for its brutality: the organization utilised

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mutilation, rape, and execution as a terror and control tactic against civilians. The organization also utilized child soldiers in what it called Small Boy Units and profited from child prostitution.

The war in Sierra Leone took the lives of more than 70,000 civilians, and displaced another 45,000; more than 20,000 civilians suffered mutilations during the RUF's diamond-digging operations (Johnson, 2002; Waterfield, 2010). Soon the conflict spilled into neighbouring Liberia, whose government had been involved in the RUF's rise, and Ivory Coast. In many cases, the illicit diamonds produced by the RUF were smuggled into Liberia where they found their way into the American and European markets (*Stop Blood Diamonds: ... Gems* n.d.). It is important to recognize that the Sierra Leone civil war was not caused by blood diamonds, rather it was being fuelled by them. The political and economic instability in the country, mixed with corruption and governmental abuse, lead to the formation of rebel groups such as the RUF, and these groups kept themselves alive and strong through the illicit diamond trade (Jang, 2012).

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Nine African countries and more than twenty armed groups fought the African Great War, the second deadliest war recorded in history after WWII. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had their second civil war lasting five years. The overlapping of both wars was a significant disadvantage to the DRC; while the government was focused on keeping their people safe and healthy, armed groups were illegally extracting rich minerals from mines to fuel their operations that jeopardized the people's safety. Once the government found out, they found no alternative than to close the mines to help ease this conflict. Thousands of people became unemployed, their reason for implementing the Mining Code in 2002. The DRC Mining Code consists of rules for trade, exploitation, sale, processing, and transportation of minerals throughout the country. Although it has been proven effective, there are changes and improvements that have been added to the Mining Code over the years (Bekoe & Parajon, 2007; *Conflict Minerals in ... Congo* 2015).

Past Union Actions

The African Union's understanding of the situation in which African countries are in, has shown in efforts of finding a solution to put an end to illegal resource extraction. The Union has emphasized the importance of respecting each country's sovereignty when dealing with such issues. People that live in their respective countries have the right to benefit, both economically and socially, from the Petroleum industries—as is the case for East Timor and many African countries—or any other resource that a country holds in large quantities.

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In 2008, the African Union implemented the ‘Mining Vision’ strategy, which would aid States to develop sufficiently strong procedures and parameters of their extractive industries. The Mining Vision would not only protect states from the dangers that rebel groups pose, but it would also bring optimal and equitable exploitation of resources. Although not all African countries suffer from conflicts that originate from rebel groups extracting natural resources for their own benefit, the ‘Mining Vision’ strategy has at least ensured that people’s lives are improved and that they are not being taken advantage of. The African Union has also supported financial transparency in these industries and the imports and exports that go with it. To further prove the Union’s commitment towards this issue, sanctions would be given to those who traffic natural resources or who carry out business with armed groups (*Natural Resource Wealth ... Council* 2013).

IV. Key Players and Points of View

Liberia

The illegal extraction of diamonds and other precious materials in Liberia has had an enormous impact on the stability of the government due to the corruption and other related crimes. Liberia’s President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf brought this problem to attention as she committed to tackle corruption and low transparency in the nation. Big overseas investors such as ExxonMobil and other companies have extracted resources and have used corrupt methods to get easy access to these abundant resources. Corruption is an issue that impacts many outcomes and solutions in the nation, and the use of these resources ignites new possibilities for government officials to perform these crimes. However, the issue in Liberia is not limited to corruption; militia groups and terrorist organizations are using illicit resources to support their groups economically. This wealth has fueled the Liberian civil wars and has given economic opportunities for terrorist groups to spread violence in the nation (*Stop Blood Diamonds: ... Gems* n.d.).

The Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of Africa’s most resource rich nations, yet it has not been able to properly profit from them due to the amount of conflict surrounding these minerals and oil. In the past, the DRC has had an issue with international firms illicitly and inhumanely exploiting its oil reserves, often making deals with armed groups in the region in the process. A greater concern is the country’s mineral deposits in the east, which have been the subject of a brutal struggle for the past fifteen years. Militias, as well factions of the Congolese

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national army, struggle for control of them, and although the minerals are not the cause of the conflict, they have helped prolong the violence. The conflict has displaced 2.7 million citizens of the North and South Kivu provinces. Part of the problem is that the international market has little way of knowing where these minerals are coming from. Oftentimes, the organizations performing the illicit mining go through a great process to ensure that the products are unable to be traced. Therefore, neither product consumers or producers are able to know if the metals used in their technological devices were illegally mined. For this reason, the DRC, along with Rwanda and multiple other African countries, has implemented a policy requiring exporting companies to provide due diligence. Due diligence is a supply-chain check to ensure that minerals being sent into the international market were mined by legal and controlled means and are not helping fund militias (*Conflict Minerals in ... Congo 2015*).

V. Possible Solutions

The issue regarding the illegal extraction of natural resources requires a multi-faceted approach. The committee's resolution should consider the political, social and economic implications of this issue. One possible approach is the strengthening of resource tracking systems in order to help eliminate the illicit trafficking of them. The DRC, and 13 other African nations, have already implemented legislation that demands foreign companies to perform due diligence on exported products. The European Union (EU), as well as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, have been trying to create effective systems to make this approach more systematic and universal.

During the G8 conference, Germany proposed the creation of a tracking system. The problem with this approach is that the corruption that plagues many of the countries involved will make this solution's implementation very difficult. For this reason, it is important that within the Union, countries are pressured into ridding their bureaucracies and militaries from corruption. Over the past few months, Nigeria has implemented a system to reduce and try to eliminate corruption in their governmental bureaucracy, which in turn decreases the amount of dirty work leading to this problem. A possible solution is to try and use the technique that proved successful to Nigeria and implement it in other nations and their natural resource markets.

Another possible solution to try and solve this issue is to stress the importance of permanent sovereignty. Countries with high resource availability—like Sierra Leone and Liberia—are being exploited by rebel groups from other countries due to the fact that they hold a great amount of oil and petroleum. Countries deserve to keep their own resources and should not have to worry about foreign rebel groups coming in and extorting their way out of this situation to

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gain an edge. Not only should countries respect each other's sovereignty, but the wealth and value that comes with the natural resources should be evenly distributed among the citizens of that specific country.

Another solution regarding this issue is achieved with the help from NGOs from around the world that are currently working in war-struck nations and with refugees that have been deprived of their food and wealth. NGOs are a powerful tool to reach individuals and implement resolutions to tackle poverty, which is one of the major causes of these illicit activities. NGOs can also help implement these national standards of resource management agreed upon by the committee in various parts of African territory. These organizations can also help the local government officials by protecting natural parks and World Heritage Sites. NGOs can also be extremely helpful in diminishing the amount of trade and killing of endangered animals for the sole purpose of obtaining and selling minerals.

A solution imposed by Peru and Ecuador a few years back: creating boundaries and 'eco-parks' to try to disable terrorist groups and organizations from gaining resources from resource-rich places in the nation, proved extremely effective in reducing this problem. Designating a specific area as a 'peace park' could tackle fighting and violence between governmental forces and militia groups and at the same time reduce the growing amount of tensions between nations. Creating these 'peace parks' could open the path to negotiations between nations and together solve this alarming issue.

VI. Current Status

Currently, the DRC has struggled over the last few years with the issue of the illicit exploitation of their natural resources that fuel the terrorist organizations and other militia groups. Recently, experts from MONUSCO and UNEP have discovered the enormity and the extreme extent of this problem inside the nation. The UN believes that the market for illegal natural resource exploitation is one of over \$1.25 billion dollars (Nellemann et al., 2016). Ninety-eight percent of this market unfortunately fuels militia groups and other terrorist organizations. Ties between terrorists and high-rank politicians have been evident these last few years.

Meanwhile, operating within the borders of Sudan and the DRC, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) are gaining millions in cash to sponsor their group by exploiting and trading natural resources. However, these natural resources are not limited to oil and minerals—ivory and tusks are also a prime victim of illegal trade and illicit activity because of their extreme monetary value and the ease of extraction. The issue of ivory trade in Sudan has risen exponentially and

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has given way to a multitude of problems of the danger of extinction to these animals. The lack of involvement and corruption within the Sudanese government has given opportunity to militia groups to effortlessly extract these natural resources from such places, creating violence and destroying natural and world heritage sites in the way.

Recently, violence in Sudan arising from this issue has completely destroyed relationships between individuals, communities, and governments. An assessment conducted by UNEP experts concluded that Sudan has an extremely dysfunctional and weak governmental structure to protect these endangered species and resources that only give wealth and capital to militia groups spreading terrorism and sparking violence throughout the nation (*Sudan: Post-Conflict ... Assessment 2007*). In Sudan there are five main types of natural resources that are directly connected to illicit activities done by different groups: oil, gas, hartwood timer, rain-fed agricultural land, and endangered animal resource extraction. While many of these concerns are local and small-scale, some of the issues regarding oil and gas can be monumental, leading to large-scale violent acts that take thousands of lives each year.

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