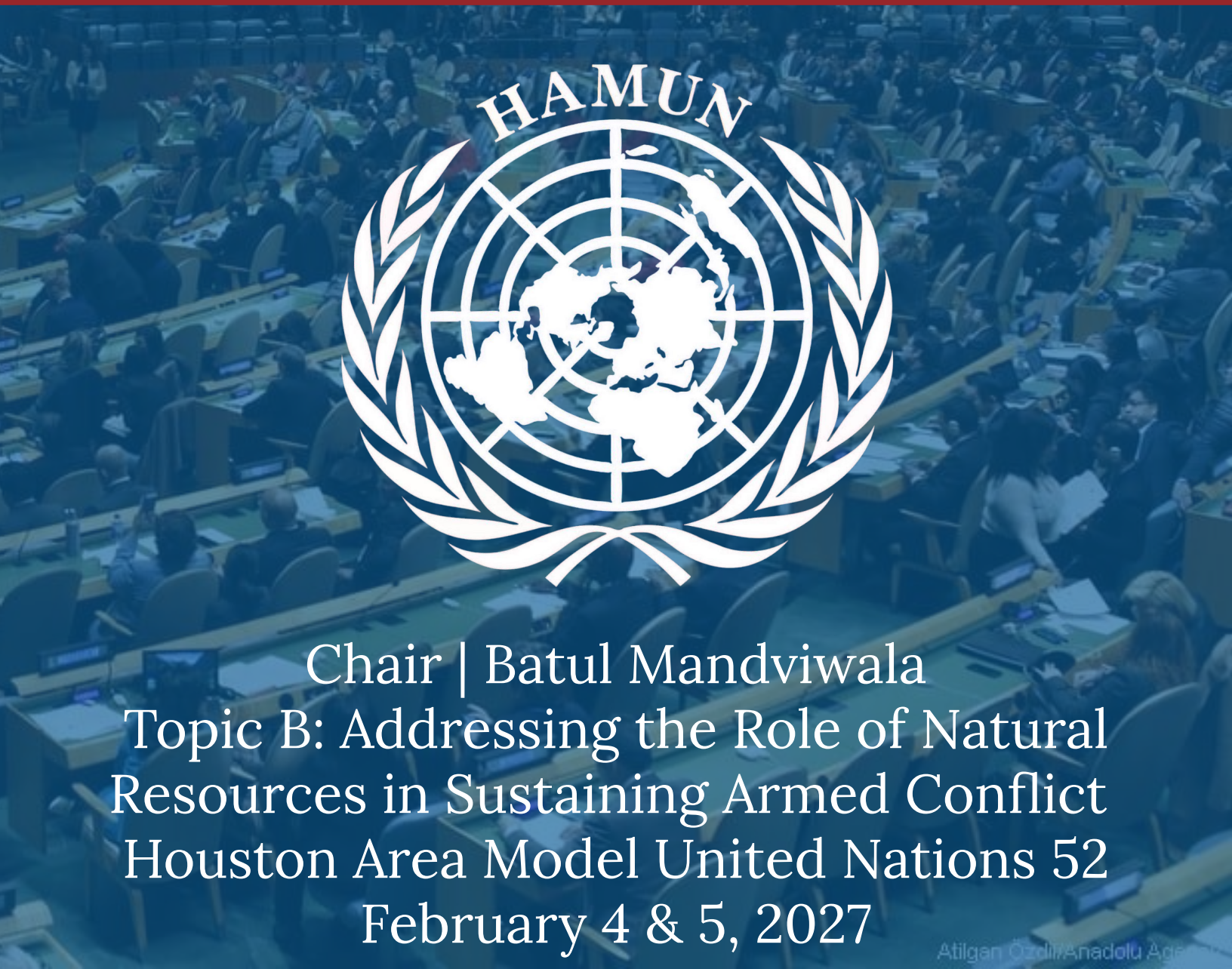
Houston Area Model United Nations
Standard Committee

DISEC



Chair | Batul Mandviwala
Topic B: Addressing the Role of Natural Resources in Sustaining Armed Conflict
Houston Area Model United Nations 52
February 4 & 5, 2027

Atilgan Ozdil/Anadolu Ag

Chair Letter

Delegates,

My name is Batul Mandviwala, and I will be your chair for the Disarmament and International Security Committee during HAMUN 52!

I am currently a senior at the University of Houston majoring in Management Information Systems, and I served as a Vice Chair for HAMUN 51 last year. I was also an active MUN member throughout high school, and I am extremely grateful for those experiences because it allowed me to develop a broad-minded and well-informed outlook of the world that we live in. This is why I have gone full-circle and am now staffing the same conferences I attended as a delegate!

The Disarmament and International Security Committee is one that is extremely relevant to today's world. Refugee crises, malnutrition, child soldiers, rogue militias, and forced labor all can often be traced back to the core issues that this committee discusses. You will be asked questions that are hard to answer, but you will also hone your ability to research and gain new perspectives. Ignorance stunts growth.

These conferences can seem overwhelming, especially for those attending them for the first time! Remember, the goal isn't to be perfect. HAMUN always makes for a memorable experience. You will meet new people, collaborate, and make surprising alliances. I ask that you do not shy away from speaking and contributing as much as you can. That's the best way to learn!

Please feel free to reach out with any questions! I look forward to meeting you all soon!

Batul Mandviwala
Chair of DISEC
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Topic Overview

INTRODUCTION

Natural resources play an important role in both the development of societies and the continuation of armed conflict. Resources such as oil, gas, minerals, timber, and agricultural land can provide communities with livelihoods and governments with economic opportunities. However, when these resources are poorly managed or unevenly distributed, they can also contribute to competition, political instability, and violence. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) identifies natural resources and environmental factors as important factors in many conflicts, particularly when valuable resources are connected to economic or political interests. [1]

Natural resources can sustain conflict in several ways. Armed groups may seek control over resource-rich areas to gain access to income, while disputes over land, water, and other resources can deepen tensions between communities. The United Nations Peacekeeping department explains that competition over natural resources can lead to conflict, especially when disagreements over access and control become connected to broader tensions. At the same time, armed conflict can damage the environment and reduce communities' access to essential resources, creating additional difficulties for recovery and peacebuilding. [3]



"For DRC's artisanal miners, promise of formalization has yielded little"
https://news.mongabay.com/2024/10/for-drcs-artisanal-miners-promise-of-formalization-has-yielded-little/

The relationship between natural resources and conflict is uncertain. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) emphasizes that sustainable management of natural resources can reduce the risk of armed conflict by addressing some of the tensions surrounding resource access and use. Effective resource management can help ensure that resources are managed in ways that are more equitable and less likely to fuel competition. [2] Protecting the environment during armed conflict is also important because environmental damage can have consequences for communities long after fighting ends. Incorporating environmental concerns into peacebuilding can therefore support longer-term recovery and stability.

Understanding the relationship between natural resources, conflict, and peacebuilding is essential for developing strategies that address not only the immediate effects of armed conflict, but also some of the conditions that allow conflicts to continue.

HISTORY

The relationship between natural resources and armed conflict has existed throughout history, as control over valuable land, minerals, forests, and other resources has been connected to political and economic power. However, scholars increasingly began examining natural resources as a prime factor in modern conflicts during the late twentieth century. Research on the political ecology of war emphasized that natural resources do not automatically cause conflict. Instead, the way resources are distributed, controlled, and exploited can influence where and how violence develops. Resource wealth can provide incentives for competitors to compete for control, while resource scarcity can create tensions over access to essential resources such as land and water. [4]

By the 1990s, growing attention was given to the role of natural resources in civil wars. The United Nations has noted that since 1990, numerous major conflicts were driven in part by the exploitation of natural resources, with examples including conflicts in Liberia, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo involving resources such as timber, diamonds, and oil. Other conflicts have involved competition over scarce resources, including land and water.

Natural resources can also sustain conflict after violence has begun. Control over valuable resources can provide armed groups or other actors with sources of revenue, allowing them to maintain their activities and making peace more difficult to achieve. [5]



"DRC to Deploy 20,000 Mining Guards in $100M Plan Backed by US and UAE"
https://www.xtrafrica.com/news/drc-mining-security-force-20000-guards-us-uae

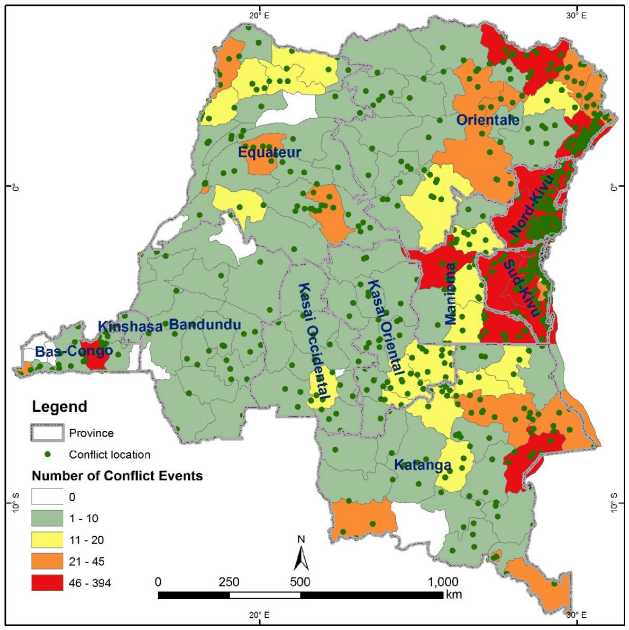
In addition, resource extraction itself can become connected to armed violence. Studies examining mining, petroleum, and timber extraction have found that military, police, rebel, and other armed forces have sometimes been involved in protecting extraction activities or suppressing opposition to them.

This illustrates that the relationship between resources and conflict can operate in multiple directions. Competition can lead to violence, while violence can also be used to secure continued access to resources. [6]

By the early 2000s, these patterns had contributed to a broader understanding that natural resources could influence the outbreak, continuation, and aftermath of armed conflict.

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This shift in understanding became important for later approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, particularly by highlighting the importance of transparent resource governance and equitable access to natural resources. [5]

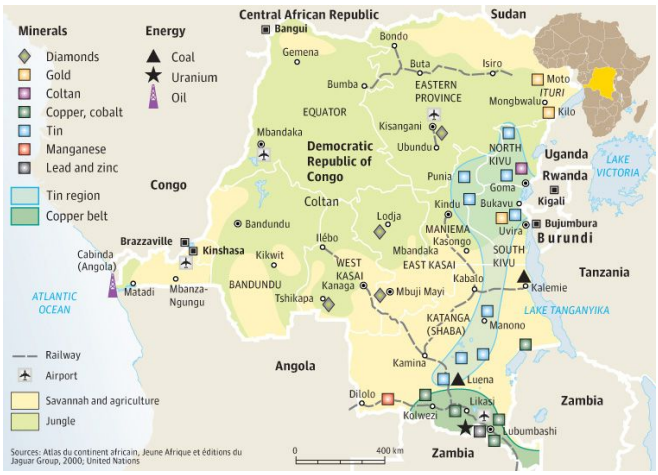


"Distribution of ACLED conflict events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 1997-2007"
https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Mineral-resources-and-conflicts-in-DRC%3A-a-case-of-Maystadt-Luca/a97875ad4cdfc1fe73519de6200b75b103875bf0/figure/1

CASE EXAMPLES

M23 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: The M23 rebel group is a Rwanda-backed militia that has seized large territories in eastern DRC since it re-emerged in 2021. The fighting between M23 and the Congolese army is ongoing despite ceasefire efforts. M23 controls critical artisanal mines in eastern DRC, and these mining sites have been tied to forced labor and sexual violence.

Minerals from these mines, such as coltan and gold, are trafficked through Rwanda toward international markets. The Rubaya mine, a primary abuse site, produces a large share of the world's coltan supply. Coltan refines into tantalum, which is essential for mobile phones, laptops, and aerospace technology. M23 generates hundreds of thousands of dollars each month from mining taxes and illegal smuggling routes into Rwanda. On December 4, 2025, the DRC and Rwanda signed the Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity, alongside a regional economic integration framework and bilateral economic agreements with the US. However, this has not proved to be useful in ending the conflict. [7][8]



"Democratic Republic of Congo's Mineral Resources" https://mondediplo.com/maps/congo2006

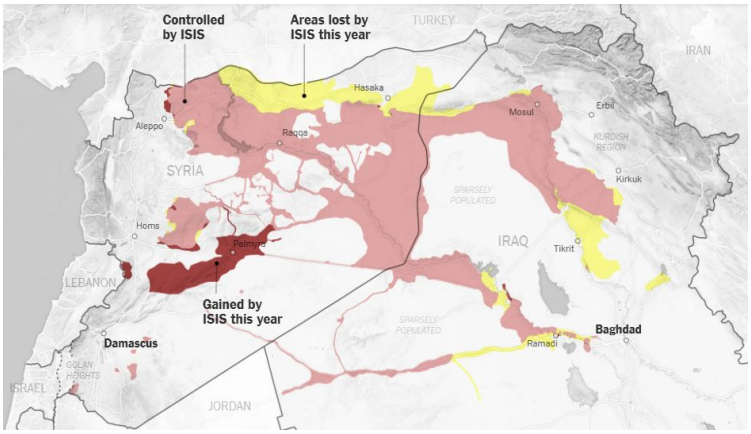
RSF in Sudan: Ongoing since April 2023, Sudan's civil war pits the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Sudan's official military, against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group fighting for power. A UAE-backed company, Emiral Resources, owns a majority share in Sudan's largest gold mine, and about 97% of gold exports from SAF controlled areas went to the UAE in 2023. The RSF controls artisanal gold mines that rely on forced labor, and gold smuggled through this network finances the RSF's weapons purchases. Dubai has been a key destination for RSF gold smuggling, as indicated by various reports, providing the RSF with a financial lifeline. There are allegations that the UAE has covertly supplied weapons under the cover of humanitarian aid, which the UAE has denied. This conflict remains active. Resources can fund both sides of a conflict simultaneously. [9]

RUF in Sierra Leone: The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) waged an insurgency in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002, creating more than 2 million refugees and devastating the country's infrastructure. The RUF used captured diamond fields to fund weapons purchases and committed horrible crimes against civilians. The diamonds were smuggled across borders with Liberian President Charles Taylor's network and sold abroad in exchange for weaponry. In 2003, the Kimberley Process was established as a response to these atrocities.

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The Kimberley Process requires a certificate of origin for diamonds entering the international market, and is credited with helping end the war as it cut off the RUF's ability to smuggle diamonds through Liberia. This solution has reduced conflict diamonds (also known as blood diamonds) from 15 percent of the global market to under 1 percent, and is a foundational example of certification schemes succeeding as a policy. [10]

ISIS in Iraq and Syria: In 2014-2015, ISIS fully controlled large areas of land across western and northern Iraq and eastern and northern Syria, for which it generated revenue by seizing oil refineries and imposing taxes on civilians under its control. These oil refineries accounted for around half of ISIS' revenue, which peaked at $50 million per month (before territorial losses cut it by more than 90%). Because all income came from this territory, losing ground in Iraq and Syria directly led to its financial decline. There were fewer businesses to tax and fewer oil fields to capitalize on. Could this perhaps mean that military reconquest of resource-rich territory can be effective? [11]



"Where ISIS Gained and Lost Territory in 2015" https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/12/18/world/middleeast/Where-ISIS-Gained-and-Lost-Territory-Islamic-State.html

Taliban in Afghanistan: The Taliban initially took power in Afghanistan in 1996, ending Soviet rule. Shortly after, opium production rapidly increased, and Afghanistan became the world's largest source of illicit opium by the end of the century. The Taliban used revenue from the sale of opium to finance their military campaigns against rival factions, and secured the support of farmers and smugglers. In 2000, the Taliban issued a ban on opium farming and dramatically reduced the crop yield, growing concerned about its widespread use. However, this also came with consequences: farmers drowned in debt and there were widespread humanitarian costs. [12]



"Taliban fighters celebrate the third anniversary of the withdrawal of U.S.-led troops from Afghanistan in Kabul on Aug. 14, 2024" https://www.politico.com/news/2024/08/25/taliban-vice-and-virtue-laws-provide-distressing-vision-for-afghanistan-un-envoy-warns-00176280

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PAST UN ACTIONS

UN Sanctions on Angola/UNITA (1990s-2000s): UNITA is a political party in Angola. UNITA rebels continued fighting after they rejected the results of the internationally-supervised 1992 elections, resulting in the UN Security Council passing Resolution 1173 in 1998. This resolution banned the purchase of Angolan diamonds that were not certified through official government channels, effectively targeting UNITA's primary method of financing their war. Later, Resolution 1237 was passed in 1999 to investigate the violation of sanctions. The result was the "Fowler Report", which named specific countries, individuals, and companies helping UNITA launder diamonds.



"UNITA"
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNITA

The exposure and mounting pressure that came from this significantly weakened UNITA's revenue streams and access to arms, which led to their military decline. This may be a model for how transparency in sanctions can meaningfully cut off conflict financing. [13]

UN Sanctions on Liberia (2001-2003) : The UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Liberia through Resolution 1343 in 2001, and prohibited all UN member states from importing rough diamonds from Liberia to cut off the illicit trade. A timber export ban followed in 2003 under Resolution 1478, due to revenue from Liberia's forestry being linked to arms purchases as well. These sanctions were tied to specific benchmarks (such as government authority being established in resource-producing areas) and they remained in place. Sanctions were lifted only when Liberia gradually demonstrated reform. Liberia's own UN representative credited the sanctions with contributing to the country's stabilization and economic recovery after a conflict. [14]



"EU to End Timber Agreement with Liberia"
https://www.liberianobserver.com/business/investment/eu-to-end-timber-agreement-with-liberia/article_23109c1c-94ed-11ef-8564-33b79002d720.html

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Sanctions Committee/Panel of Experts on South Sudan (Resolution 2206, 2015): The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2206 in 2015 as a response to South Sudan's civil war. The resolution established a sanctions regime and a panel of five members tasked with investigating how armed rebels destabilized the country by exploiting natural resources, particularly oil, as well as arms trafficking and misuse of public funds. The panel regularly publishes reports to the Security Council that document their findings, and its mandate has been repeatedly renewed through follow-on resolutions. However, even though the panel has produced valuable documentation connecting oil revenue to continued fighting, South Sudan's civil war and instability have continued for years despite the monitoring. It's worth debating whether investigations are effective if there is no enforcement behind them. [15]

UN Panel of Experts on DRC (2000-present): In 2000, the UN Security Council established a panel of experts to investigate the exploitation of natural resources during the Second Congo War.



"DR Congo: EU, US Sanction Top Officials" https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/01/dr-congo-eu-us-sanction-top-officials

Its findings confirmed a direct link between the level of military activity in DRC and resources exploited, including coltan, gold, timber, and diamonds. The panel also identified that rebel leaders and neighboring governments, including Rwanda's military and Uganda's economy, directly profited from systematic looting through confiscation, extraction, and price-fixing schemes. The Council responded by expressing support for the 1999 Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement and renewing the panel's mandate multiple times. However, despite more than two decades of reporting, there is barely any lasting enforcement, as fighting continues in eastern DRC and minerals continue to fund rebels (M23). This is the longest running and most illustrative example of the gap between UN investigation and conflict resolution. [16]

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BLOC ANALYSIS

Resource-Sovereignty Bloc:

This bloc is made up of resource-rich developing nations that prioritize sovereignty over their natural resources, rather than binding international oversight. Countries like the DRC, Angola, Venezuela, and Sudan are in this bloc, and frame external regulation as exploitation rather than partnership. This bloc prefers flexible and voluntary frameworks that allow them to resist accountability measures targeted towards their resource extraction sectors, especially where their own governments benefit from resource revenues tied to conflict financing or have been implicated in related human rights abuses. Delegates from this bloc will likely push for solutions that preserve national control over resource decisions. [17]

Transparency & Enforcement Bloc:

This bloc is made up of Western, import-dependent countries that are pushing for binding due diligence and supply chain transparency laws. This would include the United States and European Union member states. The US regulates conflict minerals through the Dodd-Frank Act (2010), and the EU's Conflict Minerals Regulation requires importers to follow a due diligence framework. However, the enforcement of these policies has been inconsistent, and critics note that these states have prioritized protecting domestic corporations and maintaining resource access alongside their transparency goals. Countries in this bloc will likely advocate for expanding and strengthening these existing frameworks internationally. [18][19]

Strategic/Transactional Bloc:

This bloc is made up of importing powers that prioritize resource access and economic partnership over human rights conditions. Countries in this bloc would include Gulf states, such as the UAE, and China. China's "resource-for-infrastructure" model offers loans and infrastructure development in exchange for extraction rights. Beijing has secured equity in 15 out of 17 of the DRC's cobalt mining operations. Gulf states like the UAE similarly engage in transactional resource relationships, as seen with gold imports from Sudan. This bloc will likely resist framing the debate around human rights conditions and instead favor economic partnership models. [20]

TOPIC B: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How should the international community balance a country's sovereign right to control its own natural resources with the international community's interest in preventing those resources from fueling armed conflict?
- Given the mixed track record of mechanisms like the Kimberley Process and UN sanctions regimes, what does effective enforcement actually look like, and who should be responsible for it: individual governments, corporations, regional bodies, or the UN itself?
- As global demand shifts toward "green" minerals like cobalt and lithium, how can the international community prevent the clean energy transition from creating new conflict resource economies, especially in regions already affected by instability?
- How do your country's own economic interests, trade relationships, and resource dependencies (whether as an exporter, importer, or neighboring state) shape its position on this issue, and where might that create tension with its stated humanitarian or diplomatic priorities?
- What role should post-conflict and reconstruction-focused resource governance play in preventing relapse into violence, and how can revenue-sharing or transparency frameworks be designed to support economic recovery without enabling renewed exploitation?

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