

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Conflict Resolution Graduate Program

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Ref: Senate Bill 471

Dear Senators

I write this testimonial in support of Senate Bill 471, with regards a Conflict Mineral Procurement Bill for Oregon. My reasons are based on first hand personal and professional experience spanning nearly 30 years, working on mitigating the effects of conflict minerals in different parts of the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

I am a professor of human rights and conflict resolution at Portland State University, with a research and policy interest in the intersectionality of natural resources, human security and conflict. My work has taken me over the last five years to resource-endowed countries as diverse as Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the northern European countries of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. In all cases I have seen and experienced both the negative effects of resource mismanagement as well as the positive effects of sound resource policies.

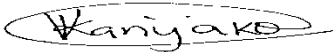
I have seen first-hand the damaging effects of conflict minerals in West Africa, where due to bad policies, the natural resources have become a curse (the so-called resource-curse) rather than a blessing to the people and communities. In Sierra Leone the extractive industry, dominated by minerals such as diamonds, gold, rutile, bauxite, iron and limonite, accounts for more than 75 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Despite the country's vast mineral wealth, few of the benefits filters down to the average citizen. The vast majority continue to live in abject poverty--on less than a dollar a day. The end result was a devastating civil war in the 1990s which engulfed Liberia, Sierra Leone and parts of Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire in West Africa. In Sierra Leone alone more than 50,000 lost their lives and millions more were displaced and scarred for life. I lived through the war.

For more than 20 years I worked as a human rights activist and advocate for victims of the resource-fuelled conflicts in West Africa, mainly Liberia and Sierra Leone where insurgent groups vied for control of the rich diamond mines. As head of a local non-profit I helped rehabilitate and reintegrate former child soldiers, provided shelter for internally displaced and refugee families and provided the platform for rape victims to regain their dignity and obtain justice from the system that had failed them. I collected testimonials, researched human rights abuses perpetuated by various armed groups, who used proceeds from the mines, to fund the conflict and in the process commit more atrocities. I presented my findings to various human rights agencies including the UN Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. In short my job involved bringing attention to the human rights violations that took place over mineral resources that mainly benefits the elites in society, governments and multinational corporations with the people bearing the consequences.

Senate Bill 471 will help close the loophole that allows blood minerals to find their way onto the global market. By promoting accountability in procurement, It very well complements the Kimberly Process, which was critical in curbing funding to insurgent groups gained from mining through violence. Needless to state, having effective policies at all levels of global governance (including here in Oregon) that supports conflict-free minerals promotes transparency, good governance and human dignity in far-flung parts of the world such as sub-Saharan Africa. People before profits saves lives. I believe the efforts of the Never Again Coalition and the various senators sponsoring this Bill is a step in the right direction. It will continue to position the State of Oregon as a leader in progressive policies on human rights, the environment, equity and equality.

Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kanyako". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed within a hand-drawn oval.

Vandy Kanyako, PhD
Assistant Professor
Conflict Resolution Graduate Program
Portland State University