

**“Metals, Minerals, and Mining: How the CCP Fuels Conflict and Exploitation in Africa”
Hearing by House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa**

Opening remarks by Chairman Chris Smith (R-NJ)

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Today, we convene to address a pressing issue that has far-reaching implications for human rights, regional stability, and global supply chains: the People's Republic of China's (PRC) involvement in Africa's mining sector and its role in exacerbating conflict and exploitation across the continent.

The extraction of valuable minerals has long been a double-edged sword for many African nations. While these resources hold the potential for economic development, their exploitation—particularly when managed irresponsibly or under corrupt regimes—has often fueled violence and instability.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has vast mineral wealth, especially in cobalt and gold, which has been a significant driver of conflict. Illicit gold mining also fuels conflict in Ethiopia and Sudan. Armed groups have profited from the extraction and smuggling of these resources, financing their operations and perpetuating cycles of violence. The United Nations has reported that mineral smuggling finances warfare, with various military forces and commanders exploiting illegal mining for personal gain.

In the DRC, it is also estimated that more than 70% of the world's cobalt—an essential mineral for lithium-ion batteries for smartphones, computers, and electric vehicles—is extracted here with the bare hands of thousands and even estimates of up to [35,000 children](#) by one of our witnesses here today, Mr. Lezhnev. If that were not horrible enough, the [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) also stated that “Observers noted children in mining areas are vulnerable to sexual violence, including sex trafficking, in part due to traditional and religious beliefs that harming children could protect against death or ensure successful mining.” China's near monopoly over the output and processing of Africa's minerals ensures that these abuses continue unchecked.

The expansion of illicit gold mining in Ethiopia has exacerbated existing conflicts. Regional states and non-state armed actors vie for control over mining concessions, using the revenues to bolster their influence and, in some cases, challenge state authority. This competition has intensified local disputes and undermined efforts toward national cohesion.

In Sudan, gold mining operations have been linked to funding armed conflicts. The control over lucrative mining areas often leads to violent confrontations between various factions, further destabilizing the region and hindering peace efforts.

Illegal mining activities, locally known in Ghana as "[galamsey](#)," have led to environmental degradation and social unrest. The involvement of foreign entities, including Chinese nationals, in these operations has strained local communities and contributed to tensions between the populace and authorities.

In response to these challenges, I reintroduced the [COBALT Supply Chain Act](#). This legislation aims to ensure that goods made using or containing cobalt refined in the People's Republic of China do not enter the United States market, addressing concerns that such cobalt is extracted or processed with the use of child and forced labor in the DRC. Then it comes back into our defense and commercial supply chains. Supply chain security is national security and this reliance on China for critical minerals is a clear vulnerability.

As co-Chair of the Congressional-Executive Committee on China, I held a hearing in [November 2023](#) that highlighted the problem of Chinese Communist Party dominance in the DRC's cobalt supply chain and how China profits from these unethical mining practices.

I also chaired a hearing in [July 2022](#) of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on child labor and human rights violations in the mining industry of the DRC. One of our expert witnesses then said that "Child labour is one of the worst forms of abuse. It is forbidden by both Congolese legislation as well as international rules and norms." And yet it continues.

The greatest beneficiaries of this system—China's state-owned mining companies—remain silent, refusing to confront an undeniable reality: from dirt to battery, from cobalt to cars, the entire supply chain is built on violence, exploitation, and corruption. This must change—and the time for change is now.

President Trump’s Executive Order for “[Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production](#)” is a crucial step toward strengthening our domestic supply chains. This action will create American jobs, drive economic growth, and reduce our reliance on foreign adversaries. The United States must break its dependence on minerals that finance the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—often extracted through forced child labor—and stop indirectly supporting the CCP’s efforts to fuel instability and regional conflict in Africa.

At the same time, as the CCP tightens its grip on global mineral markets, the U.S. must take decisive action. In line with this strategy, the U.S. Department of State has [signaled openness](#) to forming direct critical mineral partnerships with DRC—an opportunity to strengthen collaboration in securing resources essential for our technological advancement and national security.

Today we have a distinguished panel of experts who are here to provide insight into this critical issue.

I now recognize the Ranking Member, the Representative of California’s 51st district, Ms. Sara Jacobs.