



**STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR OF ASCOMARE
ON THE SITUATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE
CONGO AND INTERNATIONAL LAW**

The *Associazione di Consulenza in Diritto del Mare* (ASCOMARE) expresses its profound grief for the victims of the tragic events unfolding in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). We unequivocally condemn all acts of aggression and retaliation against the civilian population by the Movement 23 (M23) armed group, which, according to United Nations data, is responsible for widespread war crimes and human rights violations. These include civilian massacres, torture, sexual violence, human trafficking, and the recruitment of child soldiers—actions carried out with the support of Rwandan military forces and the silence of the Rwandan government. Such atrocities have fuelled the ongoing conflict in the region, which has already claimed an estimated six million lives.

We welcome the statements made on January 25 and February 21, 2025, by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, who expressed deep concern over the renewed offensive of the M23 supported by the Rwandan Armed Forces, while firmly condemning “Rwanda’s military presence in the DRC as a clear violation of international law, the UN Charter, and the territorial integrity of the DRC.”

Rwanda is the world’s leading exporter of columbite-tantalite (coltan), a critical resource driving the modern industrial revolution, powering everything from AI and electric vehicles to smartphones and space technology. A significant portion of these minerals is then shipped to major markets in the United States, China, and Europe. However, reports reveal that over 80% of the coltan exported from Rwanda is illicitly sourced from the DRC, in clear violation of international law, and qualifies as "conflict minerals," making its trade subject to legal restrictions.

The International Court of Justice, in its *Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo* cases (*Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda* and *Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Rwanda*), recognized nearly two decades ago that the exploitation of the DRC's natural resources by foreign military forces has significantly fuelled the region's conflict, in clear violation of international law. This ongoing situation must no longer be ignored.

In light of these concerns, we call upon:

1. **The Rwandan government** to take an unequivocal stance against the M23's acts of terror in the DRC. All Rwandan soldiers must immediately withdraw from and cease the illegal occupation of DRC territories, which constitutes a clear breach of the UN Charter, human rights treaties, and international law.
2. **The academic community** to take a firm stance against the actions of the M23 movement, which receives support from a nation—Rwanda—that, just 30 years ago, endured one of the most horrific genocides in human history.
3. **The international community** to impose targeted sanctions, including a comprehensive trade ban on coltan and other 3TG metals originating from Rwanda. Certification schemes under the OECD due diligence system have proven ineffective, and stronger measures are necessary to curtail the flow of conflict minerals.
4. **States acting as port, coastal, or flag states** to fulfill their human rights obligations by ensuring that vessels transporting conflict minerals are prevented from doing so. This includes exercising jurisdictional powers under the law of the sea and broader international law to hold accountable those facilitating the trade of conflict minerals illegally sourced in the DRC and other conflict or high risk areas.

These steps are crucial to ending the cycle of violence and exploitation in the region, upholding the rule of law, and ensuring justice for the people of the DRC.

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