



Human Rights Council (HRC)

Topic 2: Addressing Child Labor in the Gold and Cobalt Mining Industry of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

President: Leen Mansour



President's Letter

Honorable delegates of the Human Rights Council,

It is my utmost pleasure to welcome you to MontessoriMUN'25! My name is Leen Mansour, and I have the great honor of serving as your President for this year's HRC, alongside our esteemed deputy, Safa Alkhudairy, and our respected chair, Karam Abboud. With the guidance and support of your chairing panel, I am confident that this committee will not only be impactful and productive, but also a truly memorable experience for every one of us.

The Human Rights Council has always held a special place in my heart, and is the one committee where every debate, every resolution, and every discussion carries not only significance, but the power to truly impact lives around the world. It is the very power to influence real change that makes our work here so meaningful. This year, we are entrusted with two critical topics that demand both careful thought and empathy, so be prepared to engage fully, think critically, and speak passionately.

Our first agenda, the ethical implications in the development and deployment of Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS), calls on us to examine the intersection of technology, accountability, and human dignity.

Meanwhile, our second topic, addressing child labor in the gold and cobalt mining industry of the Democratic Republic of Congo, challenges us to confront the hidden suffering behind global progress and to find solutions that protect the most vulnerable among us.

As I encourage you all to get out of your comfort zones, voice your ideas and thoughts, bring your insight and your passion to this committee seeing as its only one of the many MUN experiences that you will hopefully be a part of in the future no matter what happens no one's there to judge, everyone has different perspectives, and there is no right or wrong.

I look forward to making this committee as meaningful and memorable for you as it has always been for me.

Best Regards,

Leen Mansour

President of the Human Rights Council

Introduction to the Committee

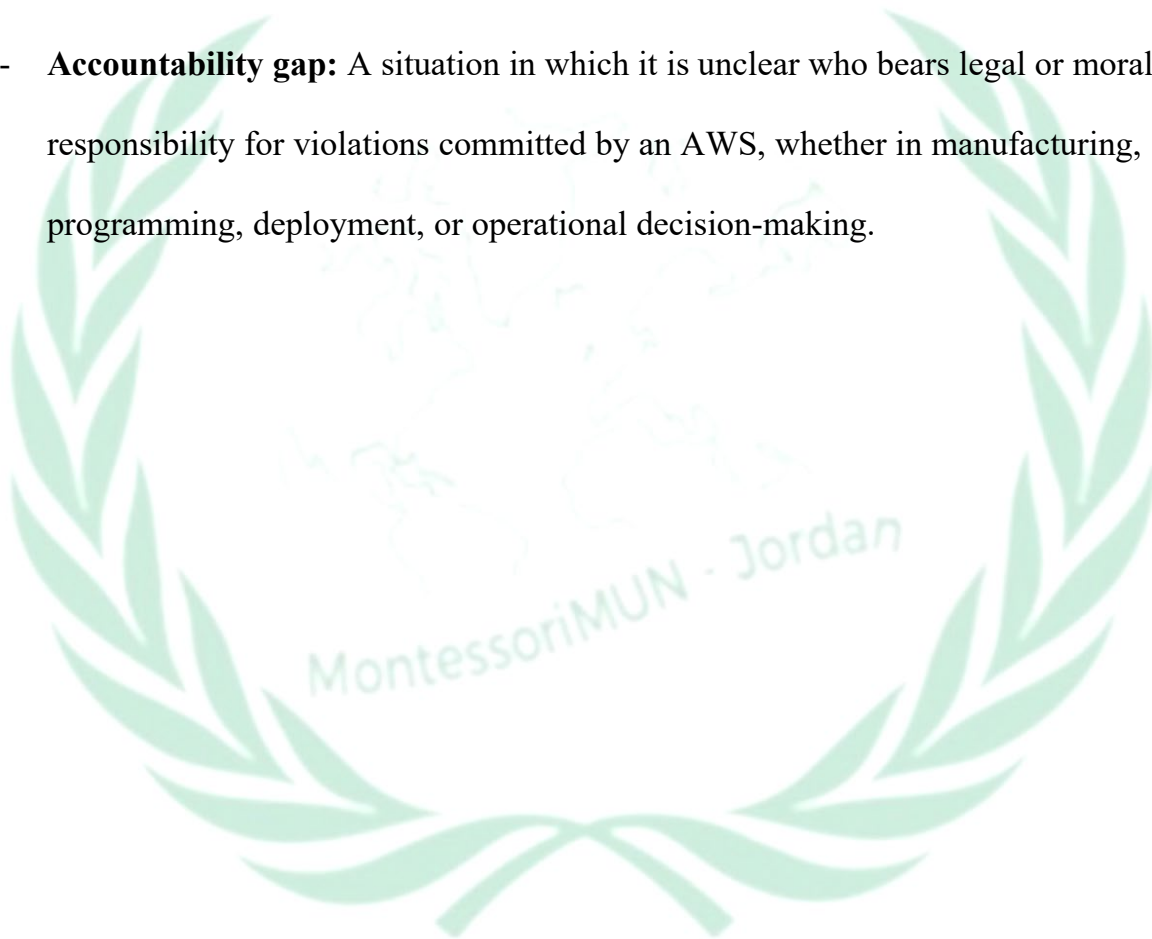
The United Nations Human Rights Council is the principal intergovernmental body responsible for the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights, including life, liberty, and due process. As a delegate in this committee, you will play a key role in addressing pressing human rights violations, evaluating global situations, and contributing to fruitful discussions. Throughout the conference, you will collaborate with fellow delegates to propose comprehensive long-term resolutions and strategies to promote equality, justice, and peace across the globe.



Terminology

- **Child labor:** Work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, and is harmful to their physical and mental development.
- **Worst forms of child labor (WFCL):** Defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention of 1999, these include the sale, trafficking, and exploitation of children, as well as work that endangers their health, safety, or morals.
- **Cobalt mining:** The extraction of cobalt, a critical mineral used in battery production. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the world's largest supplier of cobalt.
- **Exploitation:** The act of treating someone unfairly or coercively in order to benefit from their labor.
- **Corruption:** The abuse of entrusted power for private gain
- **Livelihood and vulnerability:** The dependence of families on child labor for economic survival, often driven by poverty and lack of alternative income sources.

- **Trade compliance:** Adherence to national and international laws and regulations governing trade, including import/export rules.
- **Principle of distinction:** A rule of international humanitarian law that requires combatants to differentiate between military targets and civilians.
- **Accountability gap:** A situation in which it is unclear who bears legal or moral responsibility for violations committed by an AWS, whether in manufacturing, programming, deployment, or operational decision-making.



History

- **Pre-2000s:** Child labor in mining (primarily gold, diamonds, and early copper) was widespread, driven by extreme poverty and the collapse of state-run enterprises. The problem was generally viewed as a local poverty issue rather than a major global supply chain concern.
- **Early 2000s:** Increased global demand for coltan (used in electronics) and continued conflict in Eastern DRC escalated the use of child labor in gold and coltan mines, leading to the designation of 3TGs (tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold) as "conflict minerals."
- **2002:** The DRC's government adopted a new Mining Code aiming to formalize the sector and attract foreign investment, though child labor prohibitions in artisanal mining remained poorly enforced.
- **2013 - 2015:** UNICEF estimated that approximately 40,000 children were working in mines across Southern DRC, many involved in the rapidly growing artisanal cobalt sector.
- **2018 (DRC Mining Code Revision):** The revised DRC Mining Code increased state oversight and made explicit provisions for the prohibition of the "worst forms

of child labor" in all mining, including artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM).

- **2018–2022 (COTECCO/Pact/ILO):** The US Department of Labor funded the COTECCO project (Combatting Child Labor in the Cobalt Supply Chain) implemented by the ILO and partners like Pact, focusing on strengthening government capacity and establishing early monitoring/remediation systems.
- **2019 (AfDB Project):** The African Development Bank launched the PABEA-Cobalt project, a major development initiative focused on improving welfare, creating economic alternatives, and removing children from the artisanal cobalt mines in the Copperbelt region.
- **2020 (UNICEF/GBA Fund):** UNICEF and the Global Battery Alliance (GBA) announced a multi-stakeholder fund aimed at addressing the root causes of child labor in cobalt mining communities through educational and social services.
- **2022:** The DRC passed Law No° 22/067 for the Prevention and Fight Against Trafficking in Persons, strengthening penalties for a key form of child exploitation in the mines.

- **2024:** Despite all efforts, the problem persists; current estimates suggest at least 25,000 to 40,000 children are still engaged in artisanal cobalt mining, driven by extreme poverty and the continuing global demand for the mineral.



Current Situation

Child labor remains a severe issue in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with minimal effort being put in by the country itself to eliminate this threat, with thousands of minors still working under unsafe conditions despite increased global awareness of this problem. In cobalt-mining specific areas, international monitoring systems have identified tens of thousands of children engaged in the mining industry, driven by poverty, low standards of living in the country, and the lack of proper enforcement regarding international child protection laws. Similar patterns can be found in gold-rich areas, where children are forced to work in unsafe, informal sites, sometimes in areas and zones controlled by armed groups.

Despite many ongoing international initiatives to remove and permanently end the employment and exploitation of children in the mining industry, weak governance, poverty, and supply chain issues minimize progress, while the demand for cobalt continues to climb worldwide, driving and encouraging child labor in the DRC.

Parties involved

- **Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):** Responsible for enforcing national laws regulating child labor, overseeing mining operations, and implementing policies to protect children in mining regions.
- **The International Labour Organization (ILO):** Runs programs aimed at eliminating child labor, promoting safe working conditions, and supporting the education and welfare of children affected by mining activities.
- **International buyers and consumers:** Companies and consumers in global markets indirectly influence mining practices through their demand for ethically sourced gold and cobalt.
- **Armed groups in the DRC.** Some armed groups exploit children for labor in mining areas, often using coercion or violence to control mining operations. Their involvement perpetuates child exploitation and undermines regulatory and humanitarian efforts.

Guiding questions

- How does the extreme poverty of families in the DRC directly drive children into hazardous mines? What can we do to relieve poverty?
- How can multinational companies guarantee their cobalt is completely free of artisanal child labor?
- What is the most effective long-term solution for ensuring children removed from mines stay in school?
- Who is responsible for providing long-term medical care for child miners permanently injured by toxic cobalt exposure?
- How is the dominance of foreign actors in the supply chain impacting local workers' rights?

Helpful Resources

<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/tiny-mighty-voices-against-child-labour-cobalt-mining>

<https://www.humanium.org/en/the-current-state-of-child-labour-in-cobalt-mines-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

<https://www.antislavery.org/latest/eu-omnibus-threatens-legislation-designed-to-end-forced-labour-in-supply-chains/>

<https://www.pactworld.org/blog/reducing-child-labor-mining-drc-through-economic-empowerment>

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/congo-democratic-republic-drc>

https://www.cocoainitiative.org/sites/default/files/resources/Child%20labour%20legislation%20in%20DRC_analysis_EN.pdf

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X24000755>

<https://faircobaltalliance.org/blog/fca-mid-year-report-2024/>



Citations

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<https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption>

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>

<https://www.savethechildren.net/stories/drc-cobalt-mines-child-labour-and-green-transition>

<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/ilo-launches-galab-project-democratic-republic-congo-address-child-labour>

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/drc-mining-industry-child-labor-and-formalization-small-scale-mining>

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