

I wish to emphasize my full support of the “Conflict Coltan and Cassiterite Act of 2008” bill sponsored and submitted by Senators Samuel Brownback and Richard Durbin in accordance with our quest for justice and human rights.

The bill gives visibility to the war in the Congo that has been directly or indirectly related to a natural resource which has resulted in the death of over 5.4 million to date. This war has been described by many as the deadliest war since Adolf Hitler’s armies marched across Europe. This war has been dismissed by the international community as an internal African implosion. In reality this is a battle for coltan, diamonds, cassiterite and gold, destined for sale in London, New York, Antwerp and Paris. It is a battle for the metals that make our technological controlled society vibrate and ring, and it has already claimed over five million Congolese lives in five years and broken a population the size of Britain’s. In addition to high death rates, the war has led to the recruitment of child soldiers, child slavery in mines, a rise in HIV/AIDS, the mass displacement of peoples, and the widespread use of rape as a weapon of war. The United Nations has estimated that 45,000 women were raped in the last year in one province alone.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the most mineral resource rich country in Africa. It is estimated that 64% of the world’s coltan reserves are located in the DRC, while 34% of the world’s cobalt and 10% of the world’s copper reserves are found in the country’s Katanga province. Despite the mineral richness of the DRC, 80% of the population survives on \$.30 a day; 75% of the population is undernourished according to the UN; there are an estimated 1.3 million displaced people in the DRC; UNAIDS estimate that 1.1 million Congolese are living with HIV/AIDS; and close to two-thirds of the population in the DRC cannot afford conventional health care.

“Without knowing it, tens of millions of people in the United States may be putting money in the pockets of some of the worst human rights violators in the world, simply by using a cell phone or laptop computer,” states Senator Durbin. “We ought to do all we can do to make sure that the products we use and the minerals we import, in no way support those who violate human rights abroad.”

When this bill is passed, it will require that all minerals imported from the DRC be certified. The President will also be required to compile a list of armed groups in the DRC committing human rights violations, and ensure that the importation of any product containing columbite-tantalite (“coltan”) or cassiterite (tin ore) into the United States is not from any group listed.

Violence and injustice has plagued the Democratic Republic of Congo for too long. The above steps are necessary to help chart a path of justice, peace and equality in the DRC. We urge you to support this bill to raise awareness, create accountability and ensure a peaceful future for the DRC.