

INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS – MANITOBA, INC.

Letter to the Editor – Winnipeg Free Press

Re: *Conflict Minerals Act* - Consumers complicit in sexual violence

March 21, 2014

With Nobel Laureate nominee Dr. Denis Mukwege Mukengere's upcoming visit to Winnipeg, we would like to bring an important issue forward for your readers. Dr. Mukwege is the founder and medical director of Panzi Hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and will be speaking at the Pangages Theatre March 27. He is highly regarded for the healing work he is doing with women who have faced sexual violence, and their children, in the DRC.

In the DRC 48 rapes take place every hour. The war there, one of the deadliest conflicts since World War II, has led to unprecedented levels of sexual violence against women, increasing the spread of HIV/AIDS as one of its many consequences. And Canadian consumers may be unwittingly contributing to this atrocity.

The conflict is fuelled and funded by an illegal trade in minerals in a number of African countries, including the DRC. These minerals are used in things we use every day such as cell phones, computers, tin cans, jewelry and even light bulbs. As consumers, we could play a role in ending the violence – provided we knew whether the products we buy use minerals sold illegally to support war.

In Canada, the *Conflict Minerals Act* that would make it possible for Canadians to choose products without conflict minerals has had first reading. And the *Just Minerals Campaign* (<http://cftn.ca/campaigns/just-minerals>) is underway to make Canadians aware of the issue and encourage support of the bill. We must all insist that Canadian companies' supply chains are free from the scourge of conflict minerals. Please join us in expressing your support for this bill with your MP.

Marilou McPhedran and Mary Scott – Co-Chairs

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