

# POPE FRANCIS: 'ECONOMIC COLONIALISM' MUST STOP

Posted on February 3, 2023



Congo is “not a mine to be exploited nor a land to be

plundered,” the pontiff said in Kinshasa, before calling for free elections and de-escalation of the DRC’s civil conflicts.

**Category:** [NEWS](#)

**Tags:** [economic colonialism](#), [exploitation](#), [natural resources](#), [Pope Francis](#), [Republic of Congo](#), [Tamás Orbán](#)

On his visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on Wednesday, February 2nd, Pope Francis strongly condemned “economic colonialism” in African countries, [Euronews](#) reports.

On his first day in Kinshasa, Pope Francis held a highly political speech in front of Congolese authorities and the diplomatic corps. “After political colonialism, an equally enslaving economic colonialism was unleashed,” he told his audience, which erupted in applause. “This country, largely plundered, therefore fails to take sufficient advantage of its immense resources. Take your hands off the Democratic Republic of Congo, take your hands off Africa! [...] It is not a mine to be exploited nor a land to be plundered,” the pontiff exclaimed.

While the same message is applicable to many African nations, widespread economic exploitation is a particularly grave issue in the DRC. Congo’s immense natural wealth comes not only from its vast fields of fertile soil but from the world’s largest deposits of rare earth metals and minerals, such as cobalt and lithium, crucial elements of electric vehicle battery manufacturing. Despite the country’s enormous potential, approximately 65 million of its residents live on €2 or less a day.

With the phrase ‘economic colonialism,’ Pope Francis was referring to multinational corporations in distant countries that have been repeatedly accused of unethical treatment of Congolese workers in the local mines. Over 70 percent of the globe’s cobalt is being

extracted in DRC mines, often under inhumane conditions and without basic facilities or protective gear. Lately, however, neighboring countries have also been criticized for unlawfully plundering Congolese resources, fueling bloody conflicts within the country.

Regional conflicts in the eastern part of the DRC have been ongoing since 2004, particularly in the province of North Kivu, where the insurgent group '[March 23](#)' or M23 has taken control of large swaths of territory. Congolese officials accuse their eastern neighbor, Rwanda, of supporting the M23 rebels, causing diplomatic tensions to rise between Kinshasa and Kigali.

The pope's speech did not only call for the end of hostilities and foreign exploitation but also addressed the allegedly rampant corruption among Congo's political elite. With less than a year to go until the next presidential election, Francis called for a free and transparent process. "We do not allow ourselves to be manipulated, and even less bought, by those who want to keep the country in violence in order to exploit it and do shameful business," the pontiff said.

The unethical business practices brought up by the pope include the employment of [artisanal miners](#) (workers without professional gear and tools, unassisted by motorized equipment) as well as child workers, "subjected to enslaving work in the mines."