



DUMUNC

XL 

Background Guide

African Union



Chair

Heber Ford

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Letter from the Dais

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to DUMUNC XL! I am so excited to see all of you here! Whether you were born with a gavel in each hand or just discovering the excitement of MUN, I hope this committee will be productive, compelling, and (most importantly) fun for all involved!

The problems that you will tackle and the debates you will navigate over the course of the weekend are very real in the minds of entire countries. Finding solutions won't be easy and may not always be obvious. I am excited to hear substantive reasoning, logic, and debate toward solutions. A good argument, however, is only as good as the people it can capture within it, and as such, I expect to see some phenomenal collaboration towards the best solutions. But above all else, have fun and feel cool while doing it! At the end of the day, this is still a committee where everyone in the room is a high school student trying their best, keep that in mind while you learn and reason through resource curses and energy demands!

As your chair, I plan to make this committee the second-best experience of your life; brownie points if anyone can guess the first. I will ensure inclusivity for everyone involved both moderated and unmoderated debate. If any problems or concerns arise over the course of the committee, or if you have questions about DUMUNC or Duke, please feel free to talk to me. I'd wish you luck, but I know that you won't need it anyway :)

Sincerely,

Heber Ford

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Chair, African Union

Expectations for Debate

Both historical and modern-day issues of colonialism, racism, and gross abuse are a near unavoidable part of the discussions that will happen in this committee. With that in mind, respect must be given to these topics, and as chair, I will step in if the debate becomes problematic and insubstantial. We reserve the right to remove delegates who violate the DUMUNC Code of Conduct's explicit prohibition of discriminatory conduct and sexual harassment. If you or someone you know has concerns about delegate behavior that violates these rules, please leverage our anonymous reporting system or directly speak with your chair or a member of DUMUNC staff.

Introduction

Welcome, esteemed delegates, to the African Union conference on cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As representatives of nations from around the continent, your role will address a complex issue at the crossroads of economic development, human rights, environmental sustainability, and international cooperation. Together, we will explore solutions to ensure that the global demand for cobalt aligns with the principles of justice and equity.

The DRC is one of the most resource-rich countries in the world, holding over 70% of the global reserves of cobalt, a mineral indispensable to modern technology (The Conversation, 2025). Despite this wealth, the DRC remains one of the poorest nations, grappling with systemic corruption, political instability, and limited infrastructure (CFR, 2023). The country's cobalt mining sector has been dominated by both artisanal and large-scale operations, frequently plagued by allegations of exploitation, environmental damage, and poor governance. These issues have far-reaching implications, affecting local communities, regional stability, and global supply chains (Human Rights Research, 2024).

Cobalt is a cornerstone of the energy transition, as it is essential for lithium-ion batteries used in electric vehicles, renewable energy storage systems, and consumer electronics (Mining Technology, 2025). These technologies are pivotal in reducing global reliance on fossil fuels and combating climate change (Global Human Rights, 2023). With the International Energy Agency forecasting a dramatic increase in demand for cobalt in coming decades, ensuring its sustainable and ethical supply is paramount to achieving the world's climate goals (CFR, 2023).

While cobalt mining drives technological advancement, it imposes significant costs on those involved. Artisanal miners, including tens of thousands of children, often work in dangerous and unregulated conditions (NPR, 2023). Environmental degradation harms ecosystems and communities, including deforestation, water pollution, and soil erosion (GTW Action, 2023). Furthermore, the socio-economic benefits of mining are frequently siphoned away by elites or foreign entities, perpetuating inequality (The Conversation, 2025). Outside the DRC, countries heavily reliant on cobalt imports also face risks, including supply chain instability and ethical dilemmas linked to exploitative practices (ABC News, 2025).

The stakes extend beyond the DRC, affecting all African countries and the wider world. In Africa, the cobalt industry has the potential to drive sustainable development, but only if governance improves and revenues are channeled toward infrastructure and public services (Human Rights Research, 2024). Globally, the integrity of the clean energy transition depends on addressing ethical and environmental concerns in cobalt sourcing (Global Human Rights, 2023). As delegates, you must grapple with these interconnected challenges and forge cooperation, accountability, and innovation pathways that balance local interests with global priorities.

Historical Background

Overview:

Throughout the colonial era (16th–20th centuries), European powers, including the British, French, German, and Dutch empires, removed vast quantities of cultural and historical artifacts from colonized territories. Many of these objects were taken under conditions of coercion, deception, or outright plunder. Decolonization movements of the 20th century led to increased calls for repatriation, yet legal barriers and institutional reluctance have slowed progress.

Previous African Union Action:

The African Union has developed very few to no policies on the DRC or cobalt mining, the AU does have a couple of broader initiatives to help and address issues related to mining and resource governance:

African Mining Vision (AMV): Adopted in 2009, the AMV aims to ensure that Africa's mineral resources contribute to sustainable development. It emphasizes transparency, equitable distribution of mining revenues, and environmental sustainability, which are relevant to cobalt mining in the DRC (EcoFin Agency, 2025).

Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA): The AU's AfCFTA seeks to enhance intra-African trade, including in minerals and mining products. This framework could potentially support better regional collaboration and governance in the cobalt industry.

AU's Role in 2025

Key Issues to Consider:

Balancing Ethical Concerns with Economic Growth: How can the DRC and the African Union address issues such as child labor, unsafe working conditions, and exploitation in artisanal mining without undermining the livelihoods of those who depend on cobalt mining for survival? Should corporations or governments take the lead in enforcing labor standards, and how can international stakeholders contribute meaningfully?

Governance and Transparency in Resource Management: What measures can be taken to ensure that the profits from cobalt mining directly benefit local communities rather than being concentrated in the hands of elites or foreign interests? How can the African Union work with member states to combat corruption and improve governance in resource-rich regions like the DRC?

Environmental Sustainability vs. Industrial Demand: How can cobalt mining be made more environmentally sustainable, given the rising global demand for the mineral in renewable energy technologies? Should the focus be on improving practices in the DRC, finding alternative sources of cobalt, or investing in cobalt-free battery technologies?

Potential Avenues for AU Involvement:

Bringing together the continent's many different states, the African Union can play a significant role in promoting regional discussions on labor ethics and technological needs. The committee could contribute by:

1. **Develop and Implement a Regional Strategy:** The AU could expand on initiatives like the African Mining Vision (AMV) by creating a specific framework for critical minerals, including cobalt. This strategy could focus on ethical mining practices, equitable distribution of revenue, and encouraging local buy-in.
2. **Strengthen Governance and Transparency:** The AU could work with member states to improve governance in the mining sector. This could involve anti-corruption measures, transparency in businesses, and technical assistance to enforce environmental and labor standards.
3. **Facilitate International Partnerships:** The AU could act as a mediator between African nations and international stakeholders to ensure that global demand for cobalt aligns with sustainable development goals. This could include initiating and adding bargaining power to fair trade agreements and advocating for corporate accountability for multinational

companies.

4. **Support Artisanal and Small-Scale Miners (ASM):** The AU could promote formalization programs for ASM to improve safety, reduce child labor, and integrate these miners into the formal economy. This would help address some of the most pressing human rights concerns.

Through its regional coordination, the African Union can foster a sustainable and equitable cobalt mining practice across the continent toward a renewable energy future!

Additional Committee Information

Position Papers

- In order to be eligible for awards, a **one-page** single-spaced position paper is due the night before DUMUNC (11:59 PM EST on April 4th), outlining your delegation's position on **1** of the topics outlined. You may choose the topic and style. We would prefer them as PDFs.
- Position papers should be emailed to **hhf5@duke.edu** with the email title "[WHO], Delegation Name AU," i.e., "[WHO], USA AU" , or if I was to submit one "Heber Ford, USA AU"

Preferences of the Dais

- Do **not** prewrite any resolutions, amendments, or other materials before the first committee session.
- Conduct all **committee work within committee time and spaces** to ensure equitable access to policymaking for all parties involved.
- Be respectful to your fellow delegates and the activity of Model United Nations as a whole. Stay attentive, respectfully engage with your peers, and ensure that you are fighting for your interests well.

Notes on Procedure

- We understand that as a General Assembly, some delegates may be new to Model United Nations and may need procedural assistance or reminders. Do not hesitate to tell us (e.g. passing a note) if you need a moment to catch up on procedure!
- Accordingly, to the more experienced delegates of the committee: be ready and willing to assist your less experienced peers with procedure! The chairs will look favorably upon being a team player and non-exploitative! :)
- I will note how many speeches each individual gives throughout the weekend. To ensure equitability in speaking time, I will select delegations to speak in the order of those who have spoken the least.

References and Reading Material

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