



Hearing on

**From Cobalt to Cars: How China Exploits Child and Forced Labor in the Congo**

Tuesday, November 14, 2023 – 10:00 a.m.

Statement for the Record

James P. McGovern  
Commissioner, Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Good morning. I join my colleagues in welcoming those present to today's hearing on the use of child and forced labor by Chinese firms that mine and refine cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the DRC. I regret that I am not able to attend in person.

The existence of exploitative labor relations in the DRC's mining sector is a long-standing, well-known problem that has previously been addressed by Congress, including in a [Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing](#) I co-chaired in July 2022.

To summarize the situation, the DRC is rich in cobalt, copper and other minerals that have both military and industrial applications; industrial mining of cobalt and copper is the mainstay of the formal economy; and labor conditions in both industrial and artisanal mines are dire. Thousands of children reportedly work in the mines; some workers are subjected to debt-based coercion which amounts to forced labor; and working conditions are hazardous.

Today's hearing is concerned specifically with China's role in the DRC's mining sector. Firms based in the People's Republic of China have a dominant position in the DRC's cobalt sector. This creates a supply chain problem for the U.S. as we transition from fossil fuels to green energy, as the Biden Administration has [recognized](#).

Any successful strategy to address the problem requires the active involvement of the government of the DRC, which has ratified several relevant international treaties,<sup>1</sup> and must include support for families, children and their local communities so that there are alternatives that replace the income generated from a child's labor. [U.S. foreign assistance to the DRC](#) supports programs that address working conditions in the mining sector, and the Department of

---

<sup>1</sup> The International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976); the Minimum Age Convention (2001); and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (2001).

Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs, ILAB, is implementing projects such as [\*Combatting Child Labor in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Cobalt Industry \(COTECCO\)\*](#). I support continuing and scaling up this work.

To address the PRC's role in the problem, responsible sourcing requirements must play a major role. As we have seen in the efforts to end the use of Uyghur forced labor, moral appeals to the private sector are not sufficient; the incentives businesses face must change. Importers have a responsibility to demonstrate that the products they bring in comply with U.S. child and forced labor laws. Enforcing U.S. law will cause producers to change their practices or to diversify or relocate their supply chains. The emerging green economy must not be built on the backs of exploited workers.

Thank you.