

# Conflict in Congo

In an upper-secondary class of 14–15-year-old students in the Netherlands, students conclude a lesson series on conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with a discussion activity.

Today 14 to 15-year-old students in an upper-secondary school in the Netherlands are finishing a lesson series on conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with a discussion using the activity → Thinking Hats of De Bono. The lesson is an → assessment: it is the end of the test week, students are being observed and there is a → small written test of insight at the end of the lesson. The students prepared the discussion using information and recent → newspaper articles on the activities of the Rwanda-backed rebel group M23 and local United Nations (UN) peace-keeping troops. Based on their preparations, they wrote a text.

The **primary learning objective** was to teach skills: listening, summarizing, taking another position than your own. With regard to the content, students learn to understand how power play among several actors works.

The students work in groups of six to nine students. The colours of the activity Thinking Hats of De Bono are printed on → paper and distributed among the students. White is factual, red is emotional, black is pessimistic, yellow is optimistic, green is creative and blue is reflective. One of the blue-hat students is chairperson, who leads the → discussion along three rounds: opinion sharing, asking questions

and voting. The students take notes about their discussion on a → worksheet, which is included in the evaluation.

The main questions that students need to answer: **“Is it wise for the UN soldiers to leave the DRC and how can the violence in the DRC be stopped?”**

The chairpersons summarize the discussions after each round, then check with participants whether they have summarized adequately before proceeding to the next round.



During preparatory lessons, students watched the documentary → **“Why are powerful nations unable to bring peace to DR Congo?”** by Al Jazeera.

## COMFORT ZONE

Before the lesson seven girls enter early. They joyfully discuss their preparations. This starts off quite substantively and moves on to solutions, which are already presented theatrically and fiercely. This alternates with comments that the evaluation will be OK and about other students, who they hope that they will have to do something outside their comfort zone. There is a light atmosphere, the weight of the subject cannot be felt. The conversation then moves on to the girls' grandfathers and grandmothers.

At the end of the lesson, the teacher asks a somewhat timid student how he experienced being chairperson. “Yes, I found it quite difficult, but it was actually going quite OK, wasn't it?” smiles the student. The teacher confirms this and indicates that in this way you can learn things that are a bit outside your comfort zone.

During one of the lessons there is a silence after the test. During another lesson, there is Congolese music by → Fulu Miziki – Kinshasa's music warriors, who perform music using trash materials. A couple of girls have a little dance.

A student says that the UN supports Rwanda and that in its turn Rwanda supports the M23 rebels. The teacher intervenes: “Someone says something incorrect.” The students look up and talk in confusion, searching for the mistake made. The teacher: “Does the UN support Rwanda?” Student: “No?” Teacher: “No!”

A black-hat student: “it is people's own fault that they die.”

A red-hat student laughing: “yes, I am really sorry for all that is happening!” Other student: “the UN soldiers can only leave Congo when we have sorted our shit.”

A conversation on who finances M23 emerges among students. They propose an investigation. The teacher asks what a potential outcome of such an investigation could be. A student suggests that the extraction of resources is an important source of income: “could it be a solution to better control resource trade?”

At the end of the day, four teachers (T1 to T4) exchange their diverse → experiences.

T1: “Some students were quiet during the whole discussion, some were laughing all the time.”

T2: “They need time to find their rhythm, some struggle to speak in public.”

T3: “They do not listen to each other. I needed to push and ask many follow-up questions.”

T4: “A poor chairperson has a big impact.”

**AFTER ALMOST FOUR MONTHS A TEACHER (T3) → REFLECTS ON THE LESSON:**

“De Bono did have added value. It allows the conversation to develop in a more divergent way. An activity with more specific roles, like a conference with more direct too much. And students appreciated it, also in being a test. We really moved students beyond their comfort zone. And we noticed transfer: students used the skills and knowledge they have learnt in relation to Congo to think about the Israel/Palestine conflict during classes in philosophy of life.”