Belgian Colonialism in Africa

More than 100 years ago, European countries controlled many lands around the world. These lands were called colonies. They were in places like Africa, South America and Asia.

European countries took precious goods from their colonies. They became rich and more powerful. This was called colonialism.

Belgium is a small country in the north of Europe. It was ruled by King Leopold II from 1865 to 1909. His actions in Africa were greedy and cruel. The effects on Africans still last to this day.
Exploration of Congo River Basin

The Congo River Basin had precious goods. This is an area in central Africa. It is crossed by the Congo River. Leopold sent the explorer Henry Morton Stanley to take over all the land he could get.

Stanley made unfair deals with the people who lived there. He also brought soldiers to guard and take over more lands. He was able to take over millions of miles of land.

Other European countries were not interested in the Congo area. So, Leopold was able to take it for himself. He named it the Congo Free State. It was almost 80 times larger than Belgium. It belonged to Leopold himself, not to Belgium.

Native Africans treated poorly, killed

King Leopold promised to help make lives better for Africans. But he really wanted money. The inflatable tire was invented in 1887. Suddenly, rubber was valuable. Leopold forced Africans to get ivory and rubber for Belgium. Ivory is precious bone taken from animals, like elephants. Leopold's army killed Africans who didn't make enough. Millions of Africans died.

Leopold's state made him rich. He took the money and built fancy buildings in Belgium.
The Belgian Congo

Leopold tried to hide what he was doing. But the word got out, and the Belgian government turned against him. It forced the king to give up the Congo.

The Belgian government took over. It built schools, hospitals and roads. But the Belgians also kept on mining for gold, copper and diamonds.

**Democratic Republic of the Congo becomes free country**

About 50 years later, the people of Congo had more rights. They owned property and voted for the country’s rulers. They were asking for independence.

Many people around the world wanted colonialism to stop. In the end, Belgium had to let the Congo become a free country. The new country was called the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC.

Today, the DRC is the third largest country in Africa. It has about 70 million people. Its main city used to be called Leopoldville. Now, it is Kinshasa.
But things still haven't gone well. The DRC has been torn apart by war. Millions have died from violence, hunger or disease. Millions more had to run from their homes.

### Ruanda-Urundi

Rwanda and Burundi are east of DRC. They were once German colonies. Germany named them Ruanda-Urundi. Germany lost Ruanda-Urundi to Belgium 100 years ago. Later, Ruanda-Urundi became two independent countries. They are now called Rwanda and Burundi.

### Legacy of colonialism in Rwanda-Burundi

Tutsis and Hutus are the two largest groups in the area. The Belgians thought that some races were better than others. Belgians thought that Tutsis were better than Hutus. This is because the Tutsis looked more European.

The Belgians let the Tutsis have more power than the Hutus. Over the years, the two groups kept fighting each other. One of the worst moments was the Rwandan genocide. A genocide is when one group of people kills another group in large numbers. In this case, a group of Hutus attacked the Tutsis. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed.

### Past and future of Belgian colonialism

King Leopold's greed had a huge effect on these countries. The DRC, Rwanda and Burundi have seen terrible wars and poverty. But they all have precious natural goods. Maybe, one day, these will bring peace and wealth to central Africa.