

Mac Easmainn i Saorstát an Chongó

Casement in the Congo Free State



Tá an lómhá ina léiriú ar an saghas pionóis a ghearrtaí ar fhir a raibh iachall curtha orthu ag fairtheoirí Cuideachta Rubair Anglo-Bheilgeach na hIndia rubar a bhailiú. (Iomhá le caoinchead ó Anti-Slavery International)

The image demonstrates the type of punishment inflicted on men forced to collect rubber by sentries of the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company (image courtesy of Anti-Slavery International)



Beirt fhear ceangailte le slabhra, príosúnaíthe an Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company (Iomhá le caoinchead ó Anti-Slavery International)

Two chained men, prisoners of the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company (image courtesy of Anti-Slavery International)

Go déanach sa naoú haois déag sa ré a ghlaotar 'Streacháilt don Afraic' air, bhí cumhachtaí coilíneacha na hEorpa i gcomórtas le chéile chun réigiún an Chongó a chur faoi smacht. I mí Feabhra 1885, thug Acht Ginearálta Bheirlín aitheantas d'éileamh Chumann Idirnáisiúnta an Chongó, cuideachta phríobháideach faoi smacht agus úinéireacht Rí Leopold II na Beilge. Chuir Leopold córas an-smachtúil i bhfeidhm trínar díultaíodh don phobal dúchais úinéireacht a gcuid talún agus toraidh. Cuireadh pionós orthu go fíochmhar nó cuireadh chun báis iad agus go minic tógadh a mná céile uathu munar bhailigh siad an rubar.

During the late nineteenth century, in the era known as the 'Scramble for Africa', European colonial powers vied for control of the Congo region. In February 1885, the General Act of Berlin recognised the claim of the International Association of the Congo, a private company controlled and owned by King Leopold II of Belgium. Leopold operated a very repressive system whereby the indigenous people were denied ownership of their land and produce. They were punished viciously or killed and often their wives were taken hostage if they did not collect rubber.



I mí an Mheithimh 1903 tháinig Mac Easmainn go dtí Leopoldville ag ceann deiscirt an Chongó Uachtaraigh. Thaiséal sé suas an abhainn ag brath ar ghrúpaí de mhisinéirí le haghaidh iompair agus lóistín (féach ar an léarscáil). I gcomparáid le turas roimhe sin i 1887, tháinig sé ar phobal laghdaithe agus brúite. Foilsíodh a thuarascáil, bunaithe ar staidéar agus agallaimh, i mí Feabhra 1904. Sa bhliain chéanna bhunaigh a chara, Edmond Morel, Cumann Leasu an Chongó. Mhéadaigh an cumann seo ar an eolas i measc an phobail maidir leis na hainghníomhartha agus rinne sé comhghríosú chun leasú a dhéanamh. Sa deireadh i 1908, gabhadh Saorstát an Chongó isteach sa Bheilg. Mar thoradh ar sin tháinig feabhas ar leas an phobail dhúchasaigh.

In June 1903 Casement arrived in Leopoldville at the southern end of the Upper Congo. He travelled upriver relying on missionary groups for transport and accommodation (see map). In comparison to a previous trip in 1887, he found a diminished and brutalised population. His report, based on observation and interviews, was published in February 1904. In the same year his friend, Edmond Morel, founded the Congo Reform Association. This association increased public awareness of the atrocities and agitated for reform. Eventually in 1908, the Congo Free State was annexed to the Belgian State. As a result the welfare of the indigenous population improved.



Scián iarainn agus truailí adhmaid le strapa leathair, Poblacht Dhaonlathach an Chongó (© Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann)

Iron knife and wooden sheath with leather strap, Democratic Republic of Congo (© National Museum of Ireland)