

Tin industry supply chain current proposals insufficient Congoese government should push companies to be more rigorous

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The Congoese government should be cautious about endorsing a new industry initiative to trace the origin of tin supplies from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Global Witness warned today.

"We encourage the Congoese government and companies to work together to break the links between the mineral trade and the armed conflict in eastern DRC," said Global Witness Director Patrick Alley, "but the government should convince itself of the effectiveness of the proposals before jumping to support them."

Over the last few months, ITRI -- a body which represents members of the tin industry -- has begun developing proposals to control its supply chain, following sustained pressure from non-governmental organisations and the UN Group of Experts.

"Global Witness welcomes the fact that ITRI is finally turning its attention to this issue," said Patrick Alley. "However, its current proposals fail to address the heart of the problem: how to exclude armed groups and military units from the mineral supply chain definitively."

ITRI's proposals, consisting primarily of technical and administrative checks, would require traders and middlemen to complete a set of forms declaring the origin of minerals. But critically, they do not appear to include a mechanism for independent verification of information provided by suppliers.

The limitations are starkly illustrated by a question on one of the draft forms, in which suppliers would be asked to tick a box confirming that there has been no armed group involvement in the production of the minerals.

"Which trader will ever admit that an armed group has been involved in his supply chain?" asked Patrick Alley. "This absurd question highlights a lack of commitment on the part of companies to addressing the real issues."

Global Witness warned that a blanket endorsement of ITRI's proposals, in their current form, could be counter-productive, giving the impression that companies have done enough and discouraging them from being more rigorous. Instead, the Congoese government should push companies further with a view to cutting out armed groups and military units from their supply chain once and for all.

Global Witness also called on the Congoese government to continue implementing its own procedures for tighter control of the mining sector in eastern DRC and to bring to justice military commanders involved in the illicit trade. The organisation stressed that the fight to end impunity has to take place alongside the development of administrative procedures. If not, military officials -- like their rebel counterparts -- will continue to find ways of subverting the system, thus undermining the impact of new procedures.

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Notes to editors:

1. The trade in cassiterite (tin ore), coltan, gold and other minerals has been one of the main factors driving the armed conflict in eastern DRC for the past ten years. In its July 2009 report "Faced with a gun, what can you do?" (available at: www.globalwitness.org/fwag), Global Witness documented how all the main warring parties -- rebel groups as well as the Congolese army -- are heavily involved in this trade.

For years, foreign companies, based in Europe, Asia and elsewhere, have turned a blind eye to the impact of their trade on the civilian population of eastern DRC. They have traded with suppliers known to have links with rebel groups and have bought minerals produced by these groups or by the Congolese army, thus prolonging the conflict.

2. Summary findings from a recent Global Witness visit to eastern DRC can be found at: www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/801/en/bisie_killings

3. Global Witness's response to a recent decision by British company AMC to suspend tin purchases from the DRC can be found at: http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/833/en/amc_sidesteps_responsibility