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Congo government enforces law to curb conflict mineral trade

Global Witness welcomes a move by the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) last week to enforce a national law that requires companies to ensure they are not buying conflict minerals. The government suspended two mineral traders, TTT Mining (exporting as CMM) and Huaying Trading Company, based in eastern DRC's North Kivu province, for violating the Congolese law.

The Chinese-owned companies are suspected of buying minerals without doing checks on their supply chains – known as due diligence – to make sure that their purchases did not benefit armed groups or units of the Congolese national army. The DRC government described the decision as a preventative measure and has instructed provincial authorities to launch an investigation into the matter.

“The Congolese government’s decision to suspend minerals traders for failing to do due diligence sends a strong message to other companies exporting minerals from eastern DRC that they must source responsibly, or face sanctions,” said Sophia Pickles from Global Witness. “The government should publish the findings of the investigation as soon as possible.”

The suspension follows a Congolese directive issued last September requiring all mining and mineral trading companies operating in the country to carry out supply chain due diligence, in line with international standards set by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to ensure their purchases are not supporting warring parties in eastern DRC. In February 2012 the Congolese government incorporated this requirement into national law.

This week’s crackdown was prompted by evidence uncovered by the UN Group of Experts on DRC, including findings from their November 2011 report, indicating that TTT Mining and Huaying made purchases that financed armed groups and criminal networks within the army. Global Witness spoke to a representative of TTT Mining, who denied any wrongdoing on the part of the company.

Eastern DRC suffered fresh outbreaks of violence in April and May, after General Bosco Ntaganda, a career warlord with a warrant from the International Criminal Court to his name, mutinied from the Congolese army, taking with him over 600 armed men drawn from the former CNDP rebel group. The group has made millions of dollars by controlling some of the region’s most lucrative mining areas since joining the national army in a 2009 peace deal.

“Ntaganda and his cronies are accused of rape, murder and recruitment of child soldiers. This latest insurgency stands to be financed by a war chest filled with proceeds from their illegal involvement in the minerals trade,” said Pickles. “Enforcing due diligence laws and ensuring that companies source minerals responsibly will help to break the cycle of violence in eastern DRC.”

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Global Witness investigates and campaigns to prevent natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses