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UN Security Council resolutions addressing natural resource trade in eastern Congo a major step forward, says Global Witness

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Global Witness welcomes the UN Security Council's recent passage of two resolutions that include measures to halt the illicit natural resource trade which is fuelling armed conflict in eastern DRC.

In recent investigations Global Witness has uncovered evidence that all the main parties in the conflict in eastern DRC – armed groups as well as the Congolese army – are financing themselves via the exploitation and trade of eastern DRC's mineral wealth. These minerals include cassiterite (tin ore), gold, coltan (an essential component of mobile phones) and wolframite (from which tungsten is derived). The warring parties have all committed appalling human rights abuses against the region's civilian population.

On 22 December the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 1856 extending and broadening the mandate of the UN peacekeeping force in Congo, MONUC. For the first time in its nine year history, MONUC is now mandated to 'Use its monitoring and inspection capacities to curtail the provision of support to illegal armed groups derived from illicit trade in natural resources'. This should pave the way for MONUC to begin cutting the illicit outflow of high-value minerals which keeps the armed groups operational.

Resolution 1856 also calls on all states, especially those in the region, to take appropriate steps to end the illicit trade in natural resources.

In a second resolution (1857) passed the same day, the UNSC broadened its existing package of targeted sanctions to include 'Individuals or entities supporting the illegal armed groups... through illicit trade of natural resources'. It encourages member states to ensure that companies handling Congolese minerals are exercising due diligence on their suppliers.

"Given the international community's past failure to address the economic drivers of the DRC conflict, these resolutions represent a big step forward," said Global Witness Director Patrick Alley. "The challenge for MONUC and UN member states, over the coming weeks, is to demonstrate that they are implementing them."

Resolution 1857 sets a 45-day deadline by which member states are called upon to report to the UNSC what actions they have taken to implement the measures outlined, including sanctions on those involved in the illicit trade in natural resources.

The resolution is not only a wake-up call for governments, but also for the private sector.

“Companies and individuals trading natural resources in a way that benefits the armed groups could now face asset freezes and travel bans,” said Patrick Alley. “Firms handling minerals and metals sourced from the Great Lakes region should publicly disclose full details of their supply chains in order to demonstrate that they are not fuelling Congo’s conflict.”

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Note to editors

1. UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1856 is available at:
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/666/94/PDF/N0866694.pdf?OpenElement>

UNSC Resolution 1857 is available at:
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/666/43/PDF/N0866643.pdf?OpenElement>
2. For further information on Global Witness’s findings on the involvement of armed groups and the Congolese army in the mineral trade in eastern DRC, see “Control of mines by warring parties threatens peace efforts in eastern Congo” (10 September 2008), available at
http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/663/en/control_of_mines
3. For Global Witness’s recommendations on due diligence, see “Recommendations on due diligence for buyers and companies trading in minerals from eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and for their home governments” (November 2008), available at
http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/681/en/recommendations
4. For further information on Global Witness action on eastern DRC, please see:
http://www.globalwitness.org/pages/en/drc_conflict.html