



global witness

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UN Security Council must act to stop mineral trade fuelling Congo war

Delegates from the UN Security Council visiting the Democratic Republic of Congo today and tomorrow must act decisively to prevent natural resources fuelling conflict, said campaign group Global Witness.

For over 12 years, the vast mineral wealth in the east of the country has fuelled a brutal and bloody war which has claimed the lives of millions of civilians. Now, despite ongoing conflict in the east and elsewhere, the Congolese government is demanding the 20,000-strong UN peacekeeping force, MONUC, leave the country by mid-2011. The Security Council intends to discuss the draw-down demands, as well as an upcoming renewal of MONUC's mandate, which runs out on May 31.

"MONUC drawdown should be contingent on demilitarisation of mines," said Daniel Balint-Kurti of Global Witness. "Armed groups – including the national army – are vying for control of the trade in minerals such as coltan and tin – essential components of everyday electronics items including phones and computers. If the seemingly intractable situation is to be improved, the UN and others must recognise and respond to the economic drivers of the fighting."

Global Witness is also calling on the Security Council to:

- Strengthen MONUC's mandate when it comes up for renewal, so that it can more effectively tackle the trade in conflict minerals
- Impose targeted sanctions on companies buying conflict minerals from Congo
- Ensure the development of strong due diligence standards for companies trading ore and refined metal from the Great Lakes Region

The Security Council passed a resolution in 2008 (renewed in 2009), which signalled the need to demilitarise the mineral trade and called for sanctions on companies and individuals supporting armed groups through their mineral purchases. However, to Global Witness' knowledge, no UN Member State has yet put forward to the UN Sanctions Committee the names of individuals or companies engaging in such practices, despite abundant evidence from the UN Group of Experts, Global Witness and others.

"The Security Council must start translating its rhetoric into action and should impose sanctions on companies and individuals that have violated its resolutions. The situation requires urgent action because many of the mines and trading routes in North and South Kivu Provinces are now controlled by former rebels who have been integrated into the national army, but retain the same command structures as they had when still in active rebellion," said Balint-Kurti.

The UN resolutions require peacekeepers to carry out monitoring and inspection of minerals shipments. They should also be given the authorisation and the means to actively support government law enforcement efforts to curtail illegal mining-related activities involving the military.

The resolutions also encourage UN member states to ensure that companies handling minerals from Congo exercise due diligence on their suppliers. The Group of Experts has been asked to set out guidelines for such due diligence.

Balint-Kurti said: "This is a major opportunity to set industry-wide standards that will help prevent the trade in conflict minerals. It needs active Security Council support. The need for standards that deny illegal financing to all types of armed groups is now all the more imperative given the army's increasing involvement in theft, extortion and other crimes affecting the mineral trade."

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