



Kinshasa, 28 January 2010
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Dear Mr. Alley,

The January report of Global Witness on resource-fuelled conflicts reminds me that one should not judge a publication by its cover. Behind the ambiguous graphic and title 'Lessons UNlearned', is a valuable guide to best practices, and recognition that UN peacekeepers have learned and achieved a lot in crisis countries ranging from Angola, Cambodia, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone to Liberia and Congo (DRC). I have had first hand experience in most of these countries and your report provides a well-reasoned accounting of the challenges, gains and shortcomings particular to each situation. Implicit in the search for solutions is recognition that one size does not fit all – as in the case of commodity bans and sanctions, which Global Witness has cited. The authors do well to point out where responsibility lies: that peacekeeping missions must play the cards dealt to them in their mandates and that politics sometimes trumps their best endeavours..

MONUC is in the process of defining performance goals to meet the Security Council's wish for a drawdown of its military forces in the DRC “without triggering a relapse into instability” and I can assure you that our considerations include the need for demilitarization of the mining sector. You will have noted concerns expressed by the Security Council and the Secretary-General that the DRC government, neighbouring countries and the wider international community, must do more to curb illegal trafficking in minerals, metals and other natural resources.

Neighbouring countries can help by policing their borders with the DRC and regulating transit. Distant nations on the receiving end of the trade can help by requiring due diligence and transparency from locally based companies to ensure their imports of Congolese minerals and metals do not benefit illegal operators and prolong the suffering of civilians caught in the conflict.

As you have documented extensively, rebels plunder mining zones to sustain a violent insurgency. The objective of 'Amani Leo' is to clear these zones of armed groups to allow legitimate and constructive economic activity including, agriculture, commerce and government-regulated mining. At many mining sites, local people are virtually enslaved by rebels to extract precious minerals and metals for sale on international markets. The Congolese State needs help in driving out armed groups so Government institutions can establish their presence and people can draw an honest return from their labours. National police and civil administrations will hold and stabilize these areas once they have been retaken and secured by the military.

MONUC has sought innovative approaches, leveraging its military and civilian presence to reinforce Government efforts. You are aware of our pilot project to establish five trading counters in North and South Kivu to handle sales of raw coltan, cassiterite, wolframite, tungsten and gold in five important economic zones. Centres will be constructed near mining sites in Rubaya, Mubi, Hombo, Kamituga and Baraka, and experience there will enable the Government, with our support, to refine a model for protecting civilians and collecting revenue for administrative and other services.

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Each centre will have offices for a Mines Administrator, national police and 'Seasscam' which provides technical assistance and training for small scale mining operators. There will also be secure storage for metals and minerals awaiting valuation and transshipment to regional centres in Goma and Bukavu.

Miners will deliver their goods to the trading counters where it will be weighed and valued. The trade between miners and buyers will thus take place under Government oversight and taxes will be levied at source, close to the mining areas. The assayed goods will be transferred to standardized sacks that are then sealed and tagged with identification of the source, proof of taxes paid and other information to increase transparency of the chain. When the sacks arrive in Goma or Bukavu for shipment overseas, they will be re-checked by customs officers who will finally levy an export tax.

International inspectors, reporting to MONUC will monitor and map what is coming out of these five areas and check there is no collusion between intermediaries trying to launder metals through the centres. The inspectors will also permanently map mining areas against any known presence of armed groups, to ensure they are not introducing product from elsewhere into the chain. Spot checks, by Government officials and MONUC personnel working together, will continue in order to monitor cargo at airports and main road junctions. Comprehensive coverage is not feasible, given limited resources, but random checks should help disrupt potential smugglers or diversion of the trade, away from the Government controlled areas.

This process will be refined as we gain experience, but the pilot programme is an important starting point. With enough commitment and support by the Government, it could quickly evolve into a system of governance that deprives armed groups of significant revenues. Such revenues could begin to satisfy the dire need for public services to the Congolese population, rather than financing arms traffickers or shadowy commercial networks.

The pilot project's success could benefit everyone involved in legitimate mineral exploitation and trade: the miners who will no longer be subject to informal "taxes"; the middlemen who otherwise will remain under suspicion of illegal trafficking until the industry is regularized, and buyers and companies abroad who will have evidence that the raw materials they buy and convert to high end products are free of conflict metals and minerals.

This is a very small beginning for the DRC. There could be as many as 300 mines in North and South Kivu alone and not all minerals and metals arriving in Goma or Bukavu will have been processed through the Centres. But both the authorities and the traders in eastern Congo have indicated that they are keen to proceed along the lines I have broadly outlined above and we will learn from the experience, as we proceed.

I hope we will soon be in a position to share results from this initiative that will be worthy of addition to your catalogue of 'UN Lessons Learned'. Your report puts it well: We need to take the gun out of natural resource management.

Yours sincerely



Alan Doss
Special Representative of the Secretary-General