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Diamond meeting makes some progress but governments need to renew commitments, say Civil Society Groups

A coalition of civil society organisations acknowledged some progress at the close of the sixth Intersessional meeting of Kimberley Process Certification Scheme in Windhoek, Namibia this week but said that more action was needed from governments to ensure the scheme's effectiveness. The government-led scheme was established in 2003 to prevent the trade in blood diamonds but has faced challenges since its inception.

In particular, civil society groups have frequently emphasised the need for Kimberley Process participant governments and working groups more promptly to investigate statistical anomalies and illicit cross-border trade between participants.

Susanne Emond from Partnership Africa Canada said: "There has been constructive discussion this week regarding improvements to Kimberley Process statistical analysis and some steps have been taken to address questions raised by trade data from Guinea and Lebanon. We urge participant governments to strengthen internal controls and improve monitoring systems in producing countries but also in trading and cutting and polishing centres."

The groups welcomed the commitment by KP members to develop a multi-stakeholder regional task force to address implementation of the scheme in West Africa. They said that the trade in conflict diamonds from Cote d'Ivoire was an issue of serious concern.

The groups joined the World Diamond Council in calling for governments to translate the positive discussions held at the Intersessional into strong commitments and concrete actions to close the loopholes that continue to compromise the effectiveness of the Kimberley Process.

A significant concern going into the meeting was the need for Kimberley Process participant governments to address cases of serious non-compliance by some members. In particular, campaigners sounded the alarm about the human rights abuses, militarisation of mining and diamond smuggling taking place in Zimbabwe's diamond sector. A KP team will visit the country next week.

Annie Dunnebacke from Global Witness said, "We sincerely hope that the upcoming Kimberley Process review mission to Zimbabwe is given unfettered access to the sites and people it needs to see. We urge the Government of Zimbabwe to fulfil its pledge to guarantee the safety of all individuals and groups the team meets."

The theme of Namibia's current Chairmanship of the scheme is "Diamonds for Development."

Alfred Brownell from Green Advocates, Liberia said: "We were encouraged by the constructive discussion around human rights and development held at this meeting and we echo Namibia's Deputy Prime Minister Dr Amathila's call for the Kimberley Process' human rights mandate to be given the consideration it deserves within the implementation of the scheme.

"Kimberley Process participating governments should ensure that their diamond sectors actively contribute to development. Conflicts often find their roots in poverty; however, if used wisely, revenues from the diamond trade can be a driver of development and stability."

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Signed: Centre du Commerce International pour le Développement (CECIDE), Global Witness, London; Green Advocates, Monrovia; Groupe de Recherche et de Plaidoyer sur les Industries Extractives (GRPIE), Abidjan; Network Movement for Justice and Development, Freetown; Partnership Africa Canada, Ottawa

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Notes: The Kimberley Process (KP) is a government-led rough diamond certification scheme created to halt and prevent the trade in conflict diamonds that led to the death and displacement of millions of people in Angola, Sierra Leone, DRC, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Member states are required to pass national legislation and set up an import/export control system to implement the KP. Over 75 of the world's diamond producing, trading and manufacturing countries participate in the scheme.