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PRESS RELEASE

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Conflict diamond scheme must suspend Zimbabwe

Members of the Kimberley Process (KP) Civil Society Coalition are calling upon the KP to suspend Zimbabwe from the rough diamond certification scheme, in light of recent violence used by the government to take control of the Chiadzwa diamond fields. Police reportedly shot and killed as many as 50 informal diamond diggers in November's raid, allegedly termed "Operation No Return".

"The KP was designed to halt and prevent conflict diamonds through an international regulatory regime based on internal controls in each participating country," said Ian Smillie, of Partnership Africa Canada. "The perpetration of human rights abuses and indiscriminate extra-judicial killing by governments in pursuit of Kimberley Process objectives is little better than the problem the scheme seeks to end. The Kimberley Process should act to condemn and prevent such violence."

As the economic and humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe spirals further into misery and ruin, revenues from Zimbabwe's diamonds—whether mined and marketed within or outside formal government control—are helping to prop up Robert Mugabe's repressive and increasingly violent regime.

"The Kimberley Process must take a stand against the harnessing of diamonds for systematic abuses by a pariah regime," said Annie Dunnebacke of Global Witness. "We can no longer assume that Zimbabwe has the ability or the ethical standards needed to control its diamonds in ways that conform to the principles espoused by the Kimberley Process."

In addition, there are indications, including statements from Zimbabwe's Bank of Reserve Governor Gideon Gono, of large volumes of Zimbabwean diamonds being smuggled to other countries in contravention of the Kimberley Process. In recent months, smugglers have been arrested in India and in Dubai with large quantities of diamonds, reportedly of Zimbabwean origin. Taken together with the violence and killings, these leakages compromise the legitimate international trade in KP-certified diamonds, and are a clear signal that Zimbabwe is no longer able to control a significant proportion of its diamond exports.

NGOs concerned about ending conflict diamonds call upon the Kimberley Process and its member states to act immediately:

First, the Kimberley Process must suspend Zimbabwe from participating in the certification scheme. A suspension of shipments will deprive legitimate producers in Zimbabwe of immediate revenue, but it will not stop them from mining and stockpiling diamonds against the day when Zimbabwe has been given a clean bill of health.

Second, the Kimberley Process must issue a clear and unequivocal statement about the need for all Participants to observe basic human rights in the enforcement of Kimberley Process minimum standards. Violence, the suspension of the rule of law, and human rights violations cannot be tolerated in the pursuit of Kimberley Process aims and objectives.

Third, all KP participants must be vigilant and must step up their efforts in the search for illicit Zimbabwe diamonds.

For media inquiries, please contact:

In London:

Annie Dunnebacke, Global Witness + 44 207 561 6397 or + 44 7703 108 401

In Ottawa:

Ian Smillie, Partnership Africa Canada +1 613 237-6768 or +1 613 728-9725