



global witness

PRESS RELEASE

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Metals in mobile phones help finance Congo atrocities Annual industry meeting highlights need for due diligence on supplies

As the Mobile World Congress opens in Barcelona on 16 February, Global Witness is calling on mobile phone manufacturers to audit their supply chains in order to exclude minerals financing the armed conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

There is a direct causal link between the metals trade in eastern DRC and atrocities perpetrated by armed groups against Congolese civilians. Recent work by Global Witness and the UN Group of Experts revealed that all of the main armed groups involved in the current fighting in eastern DRC finance themselves through the trade in high-value minerals. These minerals are processed into metals such as tin and tantalum, which are used in the manufacture of mobile phones.

“The surging global demand for mobile phones has been helping to bankroll armed groups in Eastern Congo’s conflict,” said Annie Dunnebacke of Global Witness. “Mobile phone manufacturers need to undertake checks all the way up their supply chains to make sure they are not buying from mines controlled by militias and military units.”

The UN Group of Experts’ latest report, published in December 2008, asserts that the world’s fifth largest tin-processing company, Thailand Smelting and Refining Co (Thaisarco), buys ore from an exporter who is supplied by mines controlled by the Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR). The FDLR is a Hutu militia whose members are alleged to include perpetrators of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The group continues to commit grave human rights abuses against Congolese civilians. Thaisarco, based in Thailand, is owned by British metals giant Amalgamated Metal Corporation (AMC) Group.

Global Witness recently wrote to major mobile phone manufacturers as well as mineral and metal traders to ask them what due diligence measures they are taking to ensure that their sourcing practices are not fuelling the conflict. While some firms have pledged to tighten their supply chain control, the mobile phone industry as a whole lacks sufficient measures to guarantee that phones and other electronics are free of conflict minerals.

“Mobile phone users do not want to buy products that are associated with crimes such as murder, torture and rape,” said Mike Davis of Global Witness. “If mobile phone manufacturers want to avoid the risk of a consumer backlash, they must act now. The Mobile World Congress is a prime opportunity for an industry-wide commitment to comprehensive due diligence measures.”

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Note to editors

1. Global Witness exposes the corrupt exploitation of natural resources and international trade systems to drive campaigns that end impunity, resource-linked conflict, and human rights and environmental abuses. Global Witness was co-nominated for the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize for its leading work on conflict diamonds and awarded the 2007 Commitment to Development Ideas in Action Award, sponsored jointly by Washington DC based Center for Global Development and Foreign Policy magazine. For more information, please see www.globalwitness.org.
2. For Global Witness's recommendations on supply chain 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.
3. 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.
4. The United Nations Group of Experts is mandated by the Security Council to monitor the UN arms embargo on DRC. The Group's latest report can be downloaded from <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=s/2008/773>.
5. UN Security Council Resolution 1857, passed on 22 December, extends targeted sanctions to "individuals or entities supporting the illegal armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo through illicit trade of natural resources". It encourages governments to "submit to the (UN Security Council) Sanctions Committee for inclusion on its list of designees, names of individuals or entities who meet the criteria (for sanctions), as well as any entities owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by the submitted individuals or entities acting on behalf of or at the direction of the submitted entities." This resolution is available at http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions08.htm.
6. For additional information on Global Witness action on eastern DRC, please see: http://www.globalwitness.org/pages/en/drc_conflict.html.