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global witness

Global Witness backs calls for halt to Zimbabwe diamond trade

Campaign group Global Witness today welcomed calls for the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, set up to stop the trade in blood diamonds, and called on participant governments to act to stop human rights abuses taking place in Zimbabwe's diamonds fields and restore the credibility of the landmark scheme.

A Kimberley Process review mission visited Zimbabwe earlier this month to investigate reports of human rights abuses, smuggling and other forms of non-compliance. Their interim report has found its way into the public domain: it shows that the mission found clear evidence of human rights abuses, and recommends a ban on Zimbabwe trading in diamonds, for at least 6 months.

"Global Witness wholly supports the call for Zimbabwe's full suspension from the Kimberley Process. The Marange diamond fields have been the scene of horrific human rights violations, military activity, and rampant smuggling over the past year – all of which has been substantiated by the recent review mission. These activities are entirely incompatible with the values and requirements of the scheme," said Elly Harrowell, campaigner with Global Witness, which was one of the original architects of the Kimberley Process.

"The Kimberley Process has a poor track record of dealing with problem cases quickly and effectively. This is litmus test for the scheme's credibility. If member governments fail to take prompt and effective action by suspending Zimbabwe, consumer confidence will be seriously shaken, which will be a blow for diamond exporting countries and the industry alike," she added.

Normally a Kimberley Process review mission will only share a summary of its report, which will have previously been consulted on by the country in question. This process would usually take around two months. In the case of Zimbabwe the team seems to have recognised the urgency of the situation and responded by issuing an interim report and recommendations, elements of which appeared in the Zimbabwe Herald on July 30th.

Global Witness recognises that suspension from the Kimberley Process is only the first step in addressing the grave situation in Zimbabwe, and stresses that continued engagement from regional governments will be vital.

Harrowell: "Suspension alone would not be enough to solve Zimbabwe's problems. Participant governments must actively support efforts to reform Zimbabwe's diamond industry in line with Kimberley Process minimum standards. Suspension should not be seen as a punitive measure – rather an opportunity for Zimbabwe to build a clean diamond sector that will contribute to the future development of the country."

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Notes: The Kimberley Process is a rough diamond certification scheme, established in 2003. It brings together Governments, industry and civil society, and aims to eradicate the trade in conflict diamonds. Member states are required to pass national legislation and set up an import/export control system. Over 75 of the world's diamond producing, trading and manufacturing countries participate in the scheme.

Website: www.globalwitness.org