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Campaigners denounce effort to silence whistle-blower before international meeting on conflict diamonds

The Zimbabwe authorities should immediately release Farai Maguwu, a prominent activist who reported abuses in Zimbabwe's notorious Marange diamond fields, the Kimberley Process Civil Society Coalition said today.

The call coincided with a June 21 meeting in Tel Aviv of the Kimberley Process (KP), an international government-led certification scheme established to prevent the trade in blood diamonds.

Maguwu was scheduled to attend the meeting and contribute to the discussion on continuing human rights abuses at Marange. He was jailed two weeks ago. Since then, the Zimbabwean authorities have repeatedly blocked his access to lawyers, medication and food, and sought to obstruct or delay bail hearings. Last weekend, he was secretly removed from the Harare Remand Prison and interrogated at length without legal counsel.

"Farai's Maguwu's arrest, and continued detention, is a blatant attempt by the Zimbabwean authorities to silence any dissent from the diamond fields," said Elly Harrowell, campaigner at Global Witness. "The government of Zimbabwe should immediately release him and stop persecuting individuals and organisations that report on human rights abuses."

Maguwu, director of the Mutare-based Centre for Research and Development (CRD), was arrested following a meeting with Abbey Chikane, the South African monitor appointed by the Kimberley Process to assess Zimbabwe's compliance with the minimum requirements of the diamond certification scheme. Chikane scheduled the timing of the meeting with Maguwu and its location. When Maguwu arrived, Zimbabwean state intelligence officials were also present, even though Chikane had been warned about the risks to Maguwu.

Within days of the meeting, police arrived at CRD's offices looking for Maguwu in relation to information they alleged he had passed to Chikane. Maguwu went into hiding but turned himself in after police had severely beaten a member of his family.

"The credibility and viability of the monitor, and the monitoring arrangement in Zimbabwe have been compromised," said Bernard Taylor, executive director of Partnership Africa Canada. "Maguwu's arrest is directly related to the fact that he has provided the Kimberley Process with valuable information about events in Marange."

The KP Civil Society Coalition also called on Kimberley Process member governments to take action to halt state-sponsored human rights abuses and smuggling in Zimbabwe's Marange diamond fields and preserve the credibility of the diamond certification scheme. The coalition called on the Kimberley Process to take the following actions:

- Suspend Abbey Chikane as Kimberley Process monitor.
- Suspend the monitoring arrangement for Marange diamonds introduced in November as part of the joint work plan between Zimbabwe and the Kimberley Process.

- Suspend Zimbabwe from the Kimberley Process until there is evidence that human rights abuses in the diamond fields have ceased and Zimbabwe is complying fully with Kimberley Process minimum requirements.

“Zimbabwe has been breaking all the rules and shouldn’t be allowed to ship blood diamonds onto international markets,” said Alfred Brownell from Green Advocates Liberia. “KP governments’ failure to address the crisis in Marange so far is a betrayal, not only of the victims of abuse, but of the scheme’s founding principles.”

Global Witness and Partnership Africa Canada published reports this week about how the trade in blood diamonds from Zimbabwe is undermining credibility in the Kimberley Process. Click [here](#) to read the Global Witness report and [here](#) to read the Partnership Africa Canada report.

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Global Witness investigates and campaigns to prevent natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses