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Côte d'Ivoire cocoa indictments: key players escape charges

The Ivorian Attorney General's charging of senior cocoa sector officials is good news, but lets key players off the hook, said Global Witness today.

Côte d'Ivoire is the world's biggest producer of cocoa and cocoa sector revenues played a key role in fuelling the civil war which began in 2002. Government officials siphoned off funds from the national cocoa institutions – bodies that collect levies from cocoa companies – which were then used to buy weapons. The UN Security Council subsequently imposed an arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire in 2004.

Last Thursday, the Attorney General announced that 23 employees of national cocoa institutions, some of them top officials, were being charged with fraud and embezzlement following an investigation into alleged misappropriation of funds. No official from the *Autorité de Régulation du Café et Cacao* (ARCC), the only 100% state-owned institution, has been charged, however.

“This is a positive move for Côte d'Ivoire's notoriously opaque cocoa sector. However, the credibility of the process will stand on its capacity to bring accountability to top levels of government – namely those ministers involved in misappropriating funds to finance the war effort,” said Patrick Alley, director at Global Witness.

Global Witness is calling for the Attorney General's office to disclose more information on the nature of the charges against each individual and to ensure that the cases are processed in a transparent manner.

“It is essential that the trials take place promptly, without political interference, and that those found guilty are punished in a way that will deter further corruption,” said Patrick Alley.

For the past year, Global Witness has been campaigning for increased transparency and accountability in the cocoa industry by the government and cocoa institutions, as well as by the chocolate industry.

Last week, the Ivorian government published, for the first time, figures on the revenues generated by levies on the cocoa sector and what they were spent on. Global Witness is calling for this data to be disclosed publicly on a regular basis.

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Note to editors

Global Witness is an independent non-governmental organisation which investigates and campaigns on the links between natural resource exploitation, conflict and corruption.

*In 2007, Global Witness released a report, *Hot Chocolate: how cocoa fuelled the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire*, which documented patterns of mismanagement of revenues, opacity of accounts, corruption and political favoritism in the cocoa sector in Côte d'Ivoire. *Hot Chocolate* also showed how more than US\$118 million from the cocoa trade had funded both sides in the recent armed conflict in the country. The report is available at www.globalwitness.org.*