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Oil and mining companies in war zones should face tougher human rights standards

Legally enforceable global standards are needed to stop oil and mining companies becoming complicit in atrocities in war zones because current voluntary codes on human rights are not strong enough, the watchdog group Global Witness said.

The new Global Witness report, “Oil and Mining in Violent Places: Why Voluntary Codes for Companies Don’t Guarantee Human Rights”, is published on Wednesday 10th October.

Many oil and mining companies provide money, transport or other support to security forces that protect their facilities in violent and unstable countries. Atrocities in countries like Nigeria, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo have led to allegations that by providing such support, companies are contributing to human rights abuses.

To show their human rights credentials, many companies have joined voluntary frameworks like the United Nations Global Compact, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights.

Global Witness analysed these frameworks’ treatment of companies’ support to armed groups. “Voluntary frameworks like the Global Compact and OECD Guidelines are far too vague about what companies should or shouldn’t do in conflict zones,” said Global Witness campaigner Diarmid O’Sullivan.

The Voluntary Principles does deal directly with this issue and, as the report shows, some companies are aiming to put its rules into practice. But the framework itself is still too opaque and open-ended to stop irresponsible companies from paying armed men who abuse civilians.

“Some companies talk about these frameworks as if they were a credit rating for human rights protection. In reality, they don’t measure what companies actually do and have no meaningful sanctions for those whose actions contribute to human rights abuses,” said O’Sullivan.

Global Witness is calling for a global standard, enforceable in law, to ensure that companies do not become complicit in human rights abuses in any country. For example, companies should not support armed groups unless the law of that country explicitly compels them to, and all such support must be fully disclosed and independently monitored.

**The report is available to download at www.globalwitness.org
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