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Diamond meeting ends without consensus on Zimbabwe Serious challenges ahead for landmark certification scheme, say NGOs

The lack of consensus among Kimberley Process (KP) certification scheme members over whether Zimbabwe can resume diamond exports from the troubled Marange area was welcomed by the KP civil society coalition today as the 'least bad' outcome. The scheme's annual meeting in Tel Aviv broke up without agreement after through-the-night talks.

The Marange diamond fields have been plagued with violence over recent years. A joint work plan was agreed last year between the Kimberley Process and the Zimbabwean government, which aimed at bringing Zimbabwe back into line with the scheme's minimum requirements. Almost no progress has been made on key aspects of this plan, including smuggling and demilitarisation of the diamond fields. Despite this, a number of governments supported a resumption of exports at this week's meeting.

"There are no winners with this result. But by maintaining a ban on exports in the absence of significant improvements in Marange, the Kimberley Process has taken an important step towards restoring its battered credibility," said Elly Harrowell from Global Witness. "If Zimbabwe follows through on its threat to export diamonds from Marange regardless of the lack of consensus, members, including the diamond industry, will need to think hard about how they will respond, and what action they can take to stop these diamonds from contaminating the international trade."

Zimbabwean authorities have demonstrated a worrying lack of respect for the three-way partnership at the heart of the Kimberley Process. Zimbabwean Minister of Mines Obert Mpofu, present at the Tel Aviv meeting, openly denigrated the role of civil society organisations in the process. The collaboration between governments, industry and civil society has underpinned the success of the KP since its inception in 2003.

Shortly before the meeting in Tel Aviv, a prominent human rights activist, Farai Maguwu, was arrested and detained by the Zimbabwean authorities. As director of the Centre for Research and Development in eastern Zimbabwe, he had been researching and exposing state-sponsored violence and military involvement in mining and smuggling in the fields. Mr Maguwu remains in detention.

"We continue to be troubled by the Zimbabwean authorities' aggressive attitude towards human rights campaigners and its disregard for the rules of the Kimberley Process. We would welcome the opportunity to work with Zimbabwe in the collaborative spirit of the scheme, to address challenges in the country's diamond sector," said Alan Martin from Partnership Africa Canada.

The coalition is calling on the Zimbabwean authorities to work constructively and openly with all members of the Kimberley Process to bring the Marange diamond fields into compliance with the minimum requirements. They also repeat their call for the immediate and unconditional release of human rights activist Farai Maguwu.

The debate around Zimbabwe eclipsed a number of positive initiatives in Tel Aviv this week, including a workshop on future improvements to the Kimberley Process, and an enforcement seminar bringing together customs and police representatives from around the world to discuss stronger implementation of the scheme.

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Contact: Elly Harrowell (Global Witness) on +44 7703 108 401 or Annie Dunnebacke (Global Witness) on +44 7912 517 127; Alan Martin (Partnership Africa Canada) on +1 613 983 6817

Notes:

1. 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.

2. The Kimberley Process Civil Society Coalition includes Green Advocates (Liberia), CECIDE (Guinea), COOPERGADI and COOPERGAC (Brazil), CLONG (Republic of Congo), CENADEP, GAERN (Democratic Republic of Congo), Fatal Transactions, GRPIE (Côte d'Ivoire), the Network Movement for Justice and Development (Sierra Leone), Centre for Research and Development (Zimbabwe), Partnership Africa Canada (PAC) and Global Witness (GW).

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