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Crisis averted by last-minute deal on Zimbabwe diamonds, but campaigners warn that biggest test lies ahead

Campaign groups Global Witness and Partnership Africa Canada today acknowledged that a deal reached by the Kimberley Process (KP) diamond certification scheme could pave the way for reinforced oversight of diamond production in Zimbabwe, while allowing for limited exports.

The agreement, if fully implemented, would help end abuses in the country's Marange diamond fields. It was finalised this evening at a meeting in St Petersburg by the government of Zimbabwe and other members of the anti-conflict diamond scheme.

Under the terms of the agreement, Zimbabwe will be allowed to export a limited number of diamonds produced since 28 May in two sites in Marange. At the same time a Kimberley Process Review Mission will visit the country to assess conditions in the region and compliance with the scheme's standards. Zimbabwe will be able to export one more batch of diamonds at the start of September, but any exports thereafter will be contingent on measurable improvements in the diamond fields.

Nadim Kara, of Partnership Africa Canada, said: "This agreement is far from perfect, and it will take considerable efforts by all parties to the Kimberley Process, especially Zimbabwe, to make it work. The crisis in Zimbabwe's diamond sector should act as a wake-up call to governments and the diamond industry: this issue is too important, both to consumers and to diamond mining communities, to keep lurching from crisis to crisis. The system needs urgent and far-reaching reform at a time when consumers are demanding action on blood diamonds."

The Marange diamond fields have been plagued by serious human rights abuses perpetrated by the Zimbabwean security forces, along with systematic smuggling. In November 2009 the Kimberley Process agreed a 'Joint Work Plan' with Zimbabwe to bring the country back into compliance with the scheme's minimum standards.

To date, progress on the conditions in the work plan which address the fundamental causes of violence in Marange has been limited. Today's agreement renews and strengthens the commitment of the Zimbabwean government and the KP to resolve all aspects of the work plan and links continued exports of diamonds to progress on the ground in Marange.

Annie Dunnebacke of Global Witness says: "It is too early to give a final verdict. Ultimately the success or otherwise of this agreement will be determined by what the main players do next. The ball is now in Zimbabwe's court to make good on its promises and act to end one of the most egregious cases of diamond-related violence for many years. We fervently hope that the governments in the Kimberley Process will, for their part, hold Zimbabwe to its commitments in order to begin to restore the battered integrity of the scheme."

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