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Global Witness calls upon the UK Government to hold British company Afrimex to account for fuelling conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The London-based non-governmental organisation Global Witness has submitted a complaint against British company Afrimex to the UK National Contact Point under the government's new, strengthened procedures for considering breaches of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.

Global Witness believes that Afrimex's trade in minerals contributed directly to the brutal conflict and large-scale human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

"The UK Government's response to this complaint will be a test of its seriousness in holding British companies to account," said Global Witness Director Patrick Alley. "Companies have a duty to abide by the OECD Guidelines, but ultimately the responsibility for ensuring that they do so rests with the government."

The complaint describes how Afrimex, which traded in the minerals coltan and cassiterite (tin ore) throughout the conflict in the DRC from 1996 onwards, made tax payments to the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie-Goma* (RCD-Goma), an armed rebel group with a well-documented record of carrying out grave human rights abuses, including massacres of civilians, torture and sexual violence. During the conflict, the RCD-Goma controlled large parts of the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu, where coltan and cassiterite are mined.

The complaint also highlights the life-threatening conditions in cassiterite mines and the use of forced labour and child labour. "There are reasonable grounds to investigate whether Afrimex sourced some of its products from such mines," said Patrick Alley.

Afrimex has persistently failed to recognise the negative impact of its activities in the DRC, despite scrutiny by non-governmental organisations, a UN Panel of Experts, and the UK Parliament's International Development Committee. Afrimex's director has admitted that the company made tax payments to the RCD-Goma and that it did not know how this money was used.

"Afrimex's payments to the RCD-Goma perpetuated the conflict and strengthened the rebels' capacity to inflict extreme suffering on the civilian population," said Patrick Alley. "There was abundant evidence of widespread human rights abuses by the RCD-Goma, which Afrimex chose to ignore."

The full text of Global Witness's complaint is available at http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/507/en/complaint_against_afrimex_uk_ltd_under_the_specifi.

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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.

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