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Open letter from civil society organisations calling on EU to require EU companies to act with due care

130 civil society organisations have [called on](#) the European Union not to squander a unique opportunity to play its part in tackling the conflict minerals trade.

Companies are currently bringing billions of euros worth of minerals into Europe every year without checking whether they have funded conflict or human rights abuses. These minerals can make their way into everyday products such as mobile phones, laptops, cars, and light bulbs. Civil society organisations have documented the links between minerals, conflict, and human rights abuses for many years, ranging from the role of minerals in funding violent armed groups to the use of child labour in mines.

The letter from civil society makes a simple request: that the EU require European companies to act with due care when buying minerals or products that may be linked to conflict or human rights abuses. The EU have adopted equivalent laws in other sectors – from food to financial services. This call is also entirely in line with existing international standards to which EU Member States signed-up years ago.

But instead of matching their rhetoric on responsible business with action, EU Member States have sought to let most European companies off the hook by favouring a law that would apply only to an insignificant number of European companies that buy minerals in their raw form, while completely ignoring the huge number of companies that bring minerals into the EU in products. To make matters worse, a proposal from Member States last December undermines the very international standards they committed to uphold, by significantly reducing the checks required by certain companies covered by the law.

If Member States force these demands on to the European Parliament – the latter having previously voted for a much stronger proposal – the law will likely have little to no meaningful impact. Most companies in Europe will be left to their own devices, letting them choose whether or not to act responsibly when buying these minerals or products. The limits of such an approach are well-known: widely publicised statistics show that very few companies in Europe are opting to do these checks. In acknowledgement of this, various countries around the world – from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United States – have passed laws to regulate this trade.

The European Union risks undermining international standards and efforts to tackle a global problem. Most importantly, this would let down the local communities who suffer from the violence and abuse associated with conflict minerals on a daily basis. In the meantime, European companies would continue to profit from this deadly trade.