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Democratic Republic of Congo: Stop the cycle of economic violence

As the UN Security Council begins its debate on the DRC, Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan argued that the important recommendations of the UN Kassem Panel to stop the cycle of economic exploitation and the shocking human rights abuses should not be brushed aside.

This final report of the Kassem Panel on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) systematically documents the way in which individuals and companies have been and are involved in natural resource exploitation in a way that fuels conflict and has led to systematic abuses of human rights.

Given the findings of the Kassem Panel, Amnesty International asked the Security Council to continue to ensure that these issues are thoroughly investigated and resolved. The organization specifically calls on the Security Council to establish a mechanism to periodically review implementation of the panel's important recommendations. Amnesty international also calls upon OECD governments and the governments in the region to implement immediately specific measures to curb exploitation of DRC's natural resources, particularly its gold and diamonds. The World Bank should condition future loans in the extractive industry sector on compliance with human rights standards.

Concluding a ten-day mission to DRC, Amnesty International's Secretary General called upon the Security Council to ensure that its arms embargo under UNSC Resolution 1493 is backed up by strong monitoring and enforcement so as to sever the links between the international supply of arms, economic exploitation and human rights abuses.

"By documenting the nexus of exploitation, arms trafficking, and conflict - the recommendations of this Panel represent an opportunity to address the root causes of a conflict that has claimed over three million lives since 1998. This nexus creates and fuels the continuing insecurity and climate of impunity in the region."

"Now more than ever, the important work begun by this Panel should be reinforced and continued. The entire international community must act on its findings and recommendations," said Ms Khan.

In 1999 and 2000, coltan production by unscrupulous businesses devastated the agricultural base in eastern DRC. As the Panel observes, the ensuing social disarray led to severe violations of human rights akin to slavery. The Kassem Panel was only able to investigate 119 of 157 parties (companies and individuals) cited for their possible involvement in the illegal exploitation of DRC's natural resources but its work has already had important consequences in ensuring corporate responsibility.

Based on her recent visit, Secretary General Irene Khan strongly urged the international community - including bilateral and multilateral institutions - to support effective customs administration, to strengthen central DRC government auditing and accounting functions, to provide material and other support to reform the criminal justice system to meet international standards and end impunity for human rights' abuse, and to build the capacity of Congolese civil society and other NGOs to monitor such violations.

"The recommendations of the Kassem Panel are critical to advancing and strengthening the peace process," Ms Khan added.

"The international community must now seize this opportunity, the failure to do so will expose the people of the DRC to continued and further abuses of human rights," Ms Khan concluded.

Background

Since its last report, the Panel was able to investigate 119 of 157 parties (three quarters of the total) cited for possible violations of economic and social rights. Although its mandate precludes it from making judgements of culpability, the Kassem Panel documents clearly that many outstanding issues have not been resolved with those companies in which they reached only provisional resolutions (Category II), those that require further updating or investigation (Category III and IV), or of most concern, those that failed to respond (Category V, totalling 38 parties). The Panel has also referred some 13 dossiers of 18 companies to OECD NCPs in Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom as well as category IV companies and individuals to the Governments in which these entities are based to carry out further inquiries. Amnesty International recommends that the respective Governments ensure that these inquiries take place and calls upon the Security Council to monitor investigations of all Category II through V cases until they are fully and satisfactorily resolved.

The Kassem Panel also identified 12 States in the region through which goods originating in the DRC may be passing of which only four - Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe - have responded with measures taken to curb exploitation. The Panel cites seven others - Angola, Burundi, CAR, Kenya, Mozambique, the Congo, Tanzania, and Zambia - for not responding to its enquiries.

Specifically, Amnesty International calls upon the UN Security Council, the international community, the OECD Committee on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises (CIME), the OECD National Contact Points, and the Governments in the region to act upon the important findings and recommendations of this report.

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