
Metals trader caught in Congolese tin row

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The Australian reported that the lucrative trade in Congolese tin has become embroiled in a political struggle between a London metals merchant and a campaign group over the tin trade's failure to prevent warlords in the Democratic Republic of Congo from profiting from tin mining.

AMC a leading trader on the London Metal Exchange has suspended purchases of cassiterite from Congo after Global Witness, an advocacy group accused the trader of buying tin from middlemen who deal with rebel groups.

AMC said that Thaisarco, its tin smelting subsidiary in Thailand which purchases tin ore from Congo would not enter into further contracts with suppliers unless it had the support of the United Nations and campaign groups for a certification scheme.

After a UN report 2008 on illicit trading by rebel groups in Congo, Thaisarco began to develop a certification scheme with ITRI, the tin industry organization, aimed at verifying the origin of shipments of tin ore.

Congolese tin mining is a cottage industry. The tin mines in North and South Kivu remote eastern provinces of Congo are worked by hundreds of thousands of artisanal miners using picks and shovels. A single container load of ore could be sourced from 10,000 miners.

AMC said that it would rather continue to buy tin from Congo while improving its certification system but that it would not renew its contracts without the support of the UN.

According to the World Bank, there are as many as two million artisanal miners in Congo an industry that is supporting more than 12 million people.

Mr Harold Sher CEO of AMC admitted that the certification system was imperfect but said that the company needed time to develop procedures to go beyond the comptoirs. We have led the due diligence. No other initiative has been started. Unless the UN endorses, we cannot go back in."

Mr Giles Robbins chairman of Thaisarco and a director of AMC said that a de facto ban was starting to take hold. Customers are saying we don't want your tin if it is of DRC origin. What we need to resume trade is the clear and unequivocal support of the UN for the ITRI regime."

(Sourced from the Australian)

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