

February 18, 2016

Question for written answer to the Commission E-001425/2016

Rule 130

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Subject: Child and exploitative labour in gold and cobalt mining

The recent reports 'Gold from children's hands — Use of child-mined gold by the electronics sector', by Stop Child Labour, and 'This is what we die for: Human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo power the global trade in cobalt', by Amnesty International, document the widespread child and exploitative labour in gold and cobalt mining.

1. Do you agree that, for example, electronic products sourced by the EU institutions and the Member States which contain gold, cobalt and other raw materials should be free from child labour, forced labour and exploitative labour conditions?
2. How do you plan to achieve this through your own public procurement and the implementation of the new Public Procurement Directive by the Member States?
3. What action is being taken, in terms of EU diplomacy and support programmes, to stop these abuses, and what will be done to make sure companies put in place due diligence processes for all gold, cobalt and other raw materials used in their products, in order to prevent child and exploitative labour in their supply chains?

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Answer given by Ms Malmström on behalf of the Commission
(May 10, 2016)

The Commission applies an ambitious approach to address labour rights concerns in global supply chains including through the promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility¹, non-financial disclosure² and sustainable development clauses in EU trade agreements.

The Public Procurement Directive³ allows for the inclusion of social and environmental aspects linked to the subject-matter of the public contracts to be assessed in the tender procedure. The Commission already voiced its intention to start a process of applying this option for certain minerals⁴. EU Member States are also able to use this option after the transposition of the directive.

In the context of the integrated EU strategy⁵ on conflict minerals, the Commission proposed to set up a due diligence system for EU importers. The Commission is also engaged in policy dialogues with a number of trade partners including China, India, Thailand, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, United States and Japan.

In the same context, the Commission supports the International Conference of the Great Lakes

¹ COM(2011) 681 final.

² Directive 2014/95/EU.

³ Directive 2014/24/EU.

⁴ JOIN(2014)0008 — Section 2.2 on public procurement incentives.

⁵ JOIN(2014)0008.

Region⁶, Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development⁷ and the Democratic Republic of Congo addressing the worst forms of child labour⁸, including in the mining sector, as well as children and women living around artisanal mines⁹. The Commission is also involved in the Extractive Global Programmatic Support programme¹⁰ due to start in early 2017 building on the successful Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. The Commission continues to address child labour and unacceptable working conditions holistically through various instruments and sectors, particularly those related to human development.

⁶ Instrument for Stability support of EUR 3 million (2014-2016) to the Regional Initiative against the illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

⁷ Programme for the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace conflict prevention, peace-building and crisis preparedness component of EUR 3 million (2014-2017).

⁸ For example: The EU funded ITC-ILO implemented project (EUR 1.1 million) on prevention and rehabilitation measures addressing children associated with armed groups or involved in worst forms of child labour in conflict or post-conflict situations with the production of the 'Handbook on WFCL in (post-) conflict settings'.

⁹ Socioeconomic reintegration project of children and female sex workers living around artisanal mines in the eastern DRC (EUR 2.2 million) PP-AP/2015/038-150.

¹⁰ With Commission's involvement this new programme implemented over the coming six years builds on the successful Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) enlarging its focus beyond revenues transparency by including also responsible business practices. In this connection the upgrade of the monitoring capacity of all the involved stakeholders including the civil society has been foreseen.