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Conflict diamond scheme must resolve Zimbabwe diamonds impasse

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The Kimberley Process (KP) rough diamond certification scheme must reach a credible agreement with the Government of Zimbabwe regarding the export of stones from the controversial Marange region, the KP Civil Society Coalition said today.

The Kimberley Process annual plenary meeting in Jerusalem ended without agreement on Marange following four days of negotiations. Restrictions on the export of stones from the diamond fields in eastern Zimbabwe, have been in place for the past year under the terms of a 'Joint Work Plan' agreed between the KP and the Zimbabwean government. The restrictions were imposed following the killing of over two hundred miners in Marange by the Zimbabwean security forces in late 2008 and patterns of violence and smuggling that persisted thereafter.

The KP Civil Society Coalition recognises that some progress has been made in Marange, notably the installation of technical controls within mining company compounds covering a 3% of the diamond fields. However, key commitments made in the Joint Work Plan and a follow-up agreement reached in St Petersburg in July - that links exports to progress on the ground and emphasises the role of Zimbabwean civil society - remain unmet. It is only through implementing these agreements that Zimbabwe will meet Kimberley Process minimum standards and prevent renewed violence in Marange.

The KP Civil Society Coalition remains committed to playing a constructive role in finding an agreement between the Kimberley Process and Zimbabwe; one which allows all Zimbabwean people to benefit from the country's diamond wealth, while ensuring that human rights are respected and the integrity of the KP scheme is preserved. We believe that such an agreement must link exports from Marange with progress in implementing existing commitments and reflect the fundamental KP principle of country - rather than individual mine - certification. The most important of these commitments include:

- Endorsement and respect for the local civil society monitoring mechanism established by the St Petersburg agreement by which Zimbabwean NGOs report to the KP on conditions in Marange.

- Measures agreed by Zimbabwe and the Kimberley Process to remove the military from Marange and put in place a system of law enforcement overseen by civilian authorities.

- Steps to tackle illegal mining and cross border trafficking of diamonds, including the establishment of regulations that allow for small scale mining of diamonds.

Once again discussions on Zimbabwe overshadowed positive progress on other issues. At the Jerusalem plenary meeting, decisions were taken to establish a committee mandated to improve the future efficiency of the Kimberley Process, in-depth discussions were held on enforcement in West Africa and a decision was taken to formalise cooperation with the World Customs Organisation.

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Notes:

1. The Kimberley Process is a rough diamond certification scheme, established in 2003. It brings together governments, industry and civil society, and aims to eradicate the trade in conflict diamonds. Member states are required to pass national legislation and set up an import/export control system. Over 75 of the world's diamond producing, trading and manufacturing countries participate in the scheme.

2. The Kimberley Process Civil Society Coalition includes Green Advocates (Liberia), CECIDE (Guinea), COOPERGADI and COOPERGAC (Brazil), CLONG (Republic of Congo), CENADEP, GAERN (Democratic Republic of Congo), Fatal Transactions, GRPIE (Côte d'Ivoire), the Network Movement for Justice and Development (Sierra Leone), Centre for Research and Development (Zimbabwe), Partnership Africa Canada (PAC) and Global Witness (GW).