

Intel says its processors are now 'conflict-free'

January 7 2014, by Peter Svensson



Intel CEO Brian Krzanich talks about materials used to make Intel microprocessors during a keynote address at the International Consumer Electronics Show, Monday, Jan. 6, 2014, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

Intel Corp., the world's largest maker of computer processors, says its processors are now free of minerals from mines held by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It's the first major U.S. technology company to make such a claim about its products. It's the fruit of four years of work by the company to determine the sources of four crucial metals widely used in electronics manufacturing: tantalum, tungsten, tin and gold.

Eastern Congo is rich in minerals, and economic activity other than mining has been disrupted by nearly two decades of fighting between the government, rogue soldiers and different ethnic groups. There's been widespread concern that foreign purchases of minerals from mines held by armed groups are fueling the conflict, though many experts say the minerals are not the root cause of the fighting.

Intel CEO Brian Krzanich made the announcement Monday in a keynote speech ahead of the opening of the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

A U.S. law passed in 2010 requires U.S. public companies to report whether their products contain minerals from rebel-held mines in Congo. Compliance is difficult for many electronics manufacturers, since a single product like a cellphone can contain components from hundreds or thousands of suppliers. Intel relies on relatively few suppliers for its chips.

There's been concern that the law has amounted to a de facto embargo on minerals exports from an area with millions of people living at a subsistence level. Carolyn Duran, manager of Intel's "conflict minerals" program said that Intel still buys minerals from the region, as long as it's comfortable the mines are in good hands.

"We are not intending to leave the region behind," Duran said.

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Citation: Intel says its processors are now 'conflict-free' (2014, January 7) retrieved 23 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-01-intel-processors-conflict-free.html>

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