

Amnesty links child labour in DR Congo cobalt mines to big business

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Cobalt mined dangerously by children in the Democratic Republic of Congo could end up in the lithium batteries of smartphones and electric cars made by Apple, Samsung or Sony, Amnesty International said Tuesday.

After questioning 16 multinationals, the [human rights](#) watchdog said world-class electronics brands are failing to ensure that no child miners were involved in [lithium-ion batteries](#) used in their products, according to a joint report released with Afreewatch.

The DR Congo accounts for more than half of global production of cobalt, mainly from the southeastern Katanga province.

Thousands of clandestine miners including numerous young children work in tunnels with rudimentary tools at risk to their health and their lives.

The firms contacted by the report were identified as clients of Asian battery manufacturers that acquire processed cobalt from Chinese mineral conglomerate Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt Ltd, which wholly owns a subsidiary in DR Congo, the report said.

The report describes how traders buy cobalt from areas where child labour is rife and sell it to a local subsidiary of Huayou Cobalt. Once processed, the cobalt is sold to battery component manufacturers in China and South Korea, which supply the multinationals.

The report, entitled 'This is what we die for: Human Rights Abuses in the Democratic Republic of Congo power the global trade in cobalt,' also includes testimony from adult and child miners who work long shifts with no protective equipment, in danger of fatal accidents and permanent lung damage.

One company interviewed acknowledged the link, but two multinationals denied sourcing cobalt from DR Congo and others took intermediate positions. Six said they were investigating the claim.

"Crucially, none provided enough details to independently verify where the cobalt in their products came from," the report said.

People don't ask how products are made

Leading automobile and electronics firms such as Daimler, Lenovo, Microsoft and Samsung were unable to declare the origin of the cobalt used in their lithium-ion batteries, Amnesty said.

Amnesty urged "multinational companies who use lithium-ion batteries in their products to conduct human rights due diligence, investigate whether the [cobalt](#) is extracted under hazardous conditions or with [child labour](#), and be more transparent about their suppliers."

"Millions of people enjoy the benefits of new technologies but rarely ask how they are made," said Mark Dummett, business and human rights researcher for the non-governmental organisation.

"It is a major paradox of the digital era that some of the world's richest, most innovative companies are able to market incredibly sophisticated devices without being required to show where they source raw materials for their components," Afrewatch executive director Emmanuel Umpala said.

The vast DR Congo in central Africa has immense mineral resources but remains one of the least developed nations in the world.

Rather than easing poverty, mining has helped fund more than 20 years of conflict, particularly in the eastern North and South Kivu provinces, which furnish large amounts of gold, tin, coltan and tungsten.

To prevent companies from indirectly financing conflicts, a US law on so-called "blood minerals" took effect in 2014 obliging firms listed in the United States to inform its regulators if they use such raw materials, mined not only in DR Congo but its nine neighbouring countries.

In a report published jointly in April 2015 with Global Witness, another non-governmental organisation, Amnesty International accused major American firms of neglecting their duties under the legislation.

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