

Human Rights Due Diligence in Mineral Supply Chains: International Developments and Chinese Efforts

by Jannick Saegert und Gregor Grossman; September 2018

Smartphones, electric vehicles and wind turbines all have one thing in common: they cannot be manufactured without critical mineral resources which often originate from conflict-affected or high-risk areas. These minerals, which are often termed “conflict minerals”, include tin, tantalum, tungsten, gold and, since more recently, cobalt. They make semiconductors faster, batteries more powerful, and metal alloys and more resistant to extreme temperatures.

Over the past decade, media coverage and NGO publications have uncovered large-scale human rights violations in the extraction and transportation of such minerals, including the financing of conflict perpetrated by armed rebel groups or criminals, the extortion of miners and the occurrence of the worst forms of child labour.

A new EU rule will require importers of such minerals to disclose information on their mineral supply chain due diligence. However, to break the link between human rights violations and mining, China is a crucial player which needs to be involved in the international framework for human rights due diligence.

The Winding Road to Responsible Mineral Supply Chains

The most horrendous reports about the linkages between the extraction of mineral resources and violent conflict came from the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Violent conflicts have been rampant in the Eastern DRC for the past 25 years since the genocide in Rwanda and have resulted in the deaths up to five million people and caused massive internal displacement.

In response, the international community deployed one of the largest UN peacekeeping missions in history to the DRC. Furthermore, in