



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Amnesty challenges industry leaders to clean up their batteries

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Amnesty International is today publicly challenging leaders within the electric vehicle industry to make the world's first completely ethical battery within five years. At the [Nordic Electric Vehicle \(EV\) Summit in Oslo](#), the organization is highlighting how lithium-ion batteries, which power electric cars and electronics, are linked to human rights abuses including child labour in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and environmental risks which could undermine their green potential.

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continue to be tainted by human rights abuses ”

Kumi Naidoo, Amnesty International’s Secretary General

“Finding effective solutions to the climate crisis is an absolute imperative, and electric cars have an important role to play in this. But without radical changes, the batteries which power green vehicles will continue to be tainted by human rights abuses,” said Kumi Naidoo, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

“The massive global corporations that dominate the electric vehicle industry have the resources and expertise to create energy solutions that are truly clean and fair, and we are challenging them to come back to Oslo next year with proof of real progress. With demand for batteries soaring, now is the time for a drastic overhaul of our energy sources that prioritizes protection of human rights and the environment.”

Human rights violations linked to mineral extraction

Electric vehicles are key to shifting the motor industry away from fossil fuels, but they are currently not as ethical as some retailers would like us to believe. Years of unregulated industry practices have led to detrimental human rights and environmental impacts, which governments and industry are not doing enough to tackle.

Amnesty International has documented serious human rights violations linked to the extraction of the minerals used in lithium-ion batteries, particularly in the DRC. [A 2016 investigation](#) found children and adults in southern DRC working in hand-dug cobalt mines facing serious health risks, neither protected by the government nor respected by companies that profit from their labour. Amnesty’s [research has linked](#) these mines to the supply chains of many of the world’s leading electronics brands and electric vehicle companies.

[Despite projections](#) that the demand for cobalt will reach 200,000 tons per year by 2020, no country legally requires companies to publicly report on their cobalt supply chains. [With more than half](#) of the world’s cobalt originating in southern DRC, the chance that the batteries powering electric vehicles are tainted with child labour and other abuses is unacceptably high.

“ We need to change course now, or those least responsible for climate change – indigenous communities and children – will pay the price for the shift away from fossil fuels. The energy solutions of the future must not be based on the injustices of the past. ”

Kumi Naidoo

There has been some progress since 2016. In response to Amnesty's research several leading companies, including Apple, BMW, Daimler, Renault, and the battery manufacturer Samsung SDI, have published data about their supply chains, and the organization is today calling on others to do the same.

Amnesty International has also begun documenting violations of the human rights of Indigenous peoples living near lithium mines in Argentina. Indigenous communities are not being properly consulted about mining projects on their lands and are given insufficient information about the potential impacts of mining on their water sources. Without human rights protections, the harm to Indigenous communities could increase as lithium demand soars.

Other emerging threats

The environmental impact of producing batteries is also a concern. Most of the current manufacturing of lithium-ion batteries is concentrated in China, South Korea and Japan, where electricity generation remains dependent on coal and other polluting sources of power.

This means that, while electric vehicles are essential for shifting away from fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, [more needs to be done to reduce the carbon footprint](#) within the manufacturing phase. Meanwhile, rising demand for minerals like cobalt, manganese and lithium has led to a surge in interest in deep-sea mining, which studies [predict](#) will have serious and irreversible impacts on biodiversity.

Amnesty International is also calling on companies to ensure that batteries are disposed of responsibly. There is already significant evidence showing that battery waste from electronics, which contains various hazardous materials, has been irresponsibly disposed of, contaminating soil, water and air.

"Every stage of the battery lifecycle, from mineral extraction to disposal, carries human rights and environmental risks," said Kumi Naidoo.

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An alternative vision

Using the Nordic EV Summit as a platform, Amnesty International today outlined its vision for an ethical battery which does not harm human rights or the environment at any stage of its lifecycle. The organization is calling for action by government, industry, innovators, investors and consumers to create an ethical and sustainable battery, which can be used for electric vehicles and in the electronic industry, within five years.

“ With a climate crisis looming, consumers have the right to demand that products marketed as the ethical choice really stand up to scrutiny ”

Kumi Naidoo

Amnesty International’s work will focus on all three phases of the battery lifecycle:

Extraction: Mapping supply chains of key minerals, calling for human rights impacts to be identified, prevented and addressed, and calling for a prohibition on commercial deep-sea mining;

Manufacturing: Calling for carbon footprints to be properly disclosed, minimised, and offset; and for rights to and at work, including health, equality and non-discrimination, to be legally protected and enforced;

Re-use and recovery: Calling for products to be designed and regulated so that their potential for re-use is optimised and waste is penalized; and illegal or dangerous exportation and dumping of batteries is prevented.

The challenge to companies

Amnesty International today emphasized that electric vehicle and electronics companies have a responsibility to ensure their products do not contribute to or perpetuate human rights abuses. The organization is calling on industry leaders to commit to a radical overhaul of their approach to energy solutions.

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Kumi Naidoo

As a first step, companies should publicly disclose information about how human rights abuses and environmental risks are being prevented, identified and addressed throughout the lithium-ion battery’s

lifecycle.


“With a climate crisis looming, consumers have the right to demand that products marketed as the ethical choice really stand up to scrutiny,” said Kumi Naidoo.

“Companies who overlook human rights concerns as they clean up their energy sources are presenting their customers with a false choice; people or planet. This approach is gravely flawed and will not deliver the sustainable changes we need to save humanity from climate devastation. We are asking industry leaders to think hard about what kind of future they want to build.”

Background

Amnesty is collaborating with Greenpeace USA to identify and map human rights and environmental impacts throughout the battery lifecycle, including critical points of intervention need to produce an ethical battery.

Efforts are underway in Norway to create on corporate actors to conduct human rights due diligence.

 Industry giants fail to tackle child labour allegations in cobalt battery supply chains

 The Dark Side of Electric Cars: Exploitative Labor Practices

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