



# POWERING THE MOBILE WORLD

This is a summary of the report "Powering the Mobile World: Cobalt production for batteries in Zambia and the DR Congo," SwedWatch, November 2007

In the Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa, 50,000 children, some as young as seven, are risking their lives mining for cobalt. This metal is needed for rechargeable batteries that power our mobile phones, laptops, portable games and MP3 players.

makeITfair has found that working conditions are often appalling and the environment is suffering irreparable damage in Congo and Zambia, where almost half of the world's cobalt is mined. Although mining companies create jobs and bring investment to poor countries where many people are unemployed, makeITfair has unearthed that salaries and working conditions are unacceptable.

In the Katanga province in Congo, poverty forces many children into mining. Exposed to mineral dust that irritates their eyes and damages their lungs, they live a very dangerous and unhealthy life. Whilst some of them only work during school holidays, others have dropped out of school because their parents cannot afford to pay the school fees. It has been estimated that around one third of the 100,000 to 140,000 people involved in mining in Katanga are under eighteen.

## LONG HOURS, LOW WAGES

In both Zambia and in Congo, workers are suffering accidents and occupational diseases that could be avoided if the companies paid for proper protection of their workers. In Zambia there were 80 deaths in the mines during 2005 alone.

Although mining companies are lining their pockets with gold as metal prices hit record levels, makeITfair's study shows that many miners cannot afford to buy enough food and medicine for their families, even though they work long hours.

While the world's increasing demand for metals included in our latest electronic gadgets is increasing, the environment is suffering in mining districts all over Africa right now. People living close to the cobalt mines in Zambia complain about polluted land and waters. Farmers who used to grow cabbages and tomatoes to make a living have lost their income because their land has been destroyed. In Katanga, many of the workers are worried about the effects of radioactivity from the uranium contained in cobalt ore.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The electronics industry accounts for a quarter of the world's consumption of cobalt. Yet consumer electronics companies such as Philips, Acer, Nokia and Apple argue that it is very difficult for them to influence the mining industry. They claim to be small consumers of metals and tell us that metals are difficult to trace. However, makeITfair's research shows that it is possible to trace many of the mines that the cobalt comes from. There is a direct link between the batteries in portable electronics and mining in Zambia and Congo.

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