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Ethical trade partners target forced labor in Artisanal and Small-scale Gold mines

A collaborative project by the Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM) and Solidaridad will help local organisations address modern-day slavery in an industry that employs 100 million people worldwide.

In response to concerns about forced labour in Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining, the Alliance for Responsible Mining and Solidaridad have today announced the release of a toolkit of guidelines and practical measures for key players in the industry.

Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM) accounts for around 25 per cent of the world's gold production and employs around 100 million people directly or indirectly. But there is little regulation in the sector to protect workers from exploitation, slavery and dangerous conditions. Women, children and indigenous people are particularly at risk: the Peruvian Ministry of Labour has reported that 48,000 people are working in forced-labour conditions.

The toolkit is designed to help miners, civil society organisations and government agencies and experts in labour and human rights identify and deal with forced labour in Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM). It follows 18 months of research and field-testing by the Alliance for Responsible Mining and Solidaridad. Humanity United, a U.S.-based foundation dedicated to building peace and advancing human freedom, provided financial support. The toolkit will be made available for anyone to download, free of charge, from the websites of the Alliance for Responsible Mining and Solidaridad.

The Alliance for Responsible Mining and Solidaridad devised the toolkit to fill an information gap within the industry. It includes practical tools such as criteria for good practice in ASM mining, guides and checklists for potential human rights abuses. Managers of companies buying gold will also be able to use it to check the source of their imported wares and understand the risks of human rights abuses.

“Forced labour is often believed to be a thing of the past, but unfortunately slavery is still common and occurs in some Artisanal and Small-scale Mining operations, at times without people being aware of their own enslaving. This toolkit provides practical guidelines to help address this complex issue through a holistic approach. We are thankful to the many contributors who shared their visions on this topic and provided feedback and to Jennifer Horning from Solidaridad for her ongoing collaboration. A big thank you to Humanity United and Solidaridad for their financial support.” says Lina Villa-Córdoba, Executive Director of the Alliance for Responsible Mining.

Miners and organisations working in the sector are often unaware of their rights and how to protect themselves. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), women and children are forced to work in brothels in mining communities. Traffickers often draw them into debt bondage by charging them upfront fees for jobs that do not exist. Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable because the language barrier means they are unable to report abuse.

The miners themselves often work in hazardous conditions, with little technological support or safety provision. Tunnels in hard-rock mines are often dug without any input from trained engineers and workers may operate without bracing or safety equipment. In alluvial mining there is a high risk of drowning or exposure to chemicals such as mercury.

The toolkit builds on the partners' experience of working with artisanal miners worldwide, and draws in particular from the Fairmined Standard developed by ARM. The Fairmined Standard promotes responsible mining practices for ASM gold mining, specifically addressing Forced Labour and Child Labour, not only in the certified mines, but also, progressively, in the surrounding communities.

Jennifer Horning, International Gold Programme Coordinator at Solidaridad, says, "It is tragic that slavery still exists in the present day. The informal gold sector has been named as one of the highest-risk industries. Solidaridad recognised while working among small-scale miners to enable good labour practices that more tools were needed to help victims and prevent abuse. We were pleased to join forces with the Alliance for Responsible Mining and Humanity United to develop the toolkit, which is tailored to the specific challenges of the sector. We hope that it will help achieve our long-term goal: to guide people working on these tough issues to end the exploitation taking place in mining communities today."

The partners carried out extensive field-testing of the toolkit in Peru and Colombia, in collaboration with the Colombian organization Amichocó, following research and consultation with experts in the human rights field. It builds on previous work testing the effectiveness of certification for gold – such as Fairmined – in highlighting and preventing forced labour in ASM.

Gabriel Deussom, Program Manager for the Democratic Republic of Congo at anti-slavery organisation Free the Slaves, said: "This toolkit is very interesting and invaluable. I see its use for our work in DRC and for our partners."

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Notes to editors:

1. The toolkit can be downloaded for free from ARM's website
<http://communitymining.org/en/capacity-building> or www.solidaridadnetwork.org/publications.
2. The Alliance for Responsible Mining, Solidaridad and Humanity United joined forces in 2012 to produce a joint publication, "Addressing Forced Labor in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining: A Practitioner's Toolkit."
3. Humanity United was founded in the U.S. in 2005 as part of the Omidyar Group to build peace, advance human freedom and combat slavery worldwide. Its website is www.humanityunited.org
4. The United Nations estimated in 2009 that small-scale mining employed 100 million people around the world, including between 10 and 15 million miners.
5. The Alliance for Responsible Mining and Solidaridad expect to release a Spanish translation of the toolkit and possibly versions in other languages in the future.

For more information on the work of the Alliance for Responsible Mining and the Fairmined Standard please visit www.communitymining.org.

For more information on the work of Solidaridad, please visit:
<http://www.solidaridadnetwork.org/supply-chains/gold>.