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Inauguration of Congo's New President: Prospects for Mining Sector Reform

Kinshasa, DR Congo: On the eve of President-elect Joseph Kabila's inauguration on 6 December, Patricia Feeney, executive director of Rights and Accountability in Development (www.raid-uk.org) is in Kinshasa and will be available for comment on the prospects for mining sector reform under the DRC's first democratically elected government in over 40 years. Senior UN officials, the head of Gecamines, Paul Fortin, and a number of mining companies' chief executives are also expected to attend.

In February, RAID called on World Bank President Wolfowitz to investigate why the Bank's program for restructuring the DRC's mining sector has been completely derailed. RAID also called on the Bank to investigate a number of mining contracts, which were signed during the war or transition.

The DRC's state-mining company, Gecamines – which was in the early 1990s the most lucrative source of state revenue – has now been stripped of virtually all of its assets and ore bodies through a number of disadvantageous contracts. Most of the concessions were awarded behind closed doors in violation of the new mining code, which was created with the support of the World Bank.

“It's a pivotal moment for the Congo,” said Feeney. “The next 100 days will show whether President Kabila has the political will to renegotiate a number of particularly contentious mining contracts with Gecamines and other state-owned enterprises. Who is appointed to cabinet posts will be a clear signal whether Kabila is willing to embrace the reform agenda. Change is needed: for example, the Mining Registry is still unable to provide complete and updated information on exactly who has legitimate title to Congo's mineral reserves”.

“Now that there's a newly-elected government, there can be no further excuse on the part of the World Bank and major donor governments to delay using their leverage to combat corruption and support good governance”, said Feeney. “Whether the World Bank makes public its legal, financial and environmental audits of Gecamines will be a litmus test of the Bank's commitment to transparency in the extractive industries”.

“Unless bold measures are taken, the Congolese people will continue to be the victims and not the beneficiaries of the DRC's vast natural resource wealth. It's time for action, not empty rhetoric”.

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