



Media release

UK Authorities Called to Act on “Blood Gold” Case following Swiss Ruling on Argor-Heraeus Appeal

February 4, 2014 – A key ruling by the Swiss Federal Criminal Court has given momentum to a war crimes case against the Swiss gold refining giant, Argor-Heraeus SA, alleged to have laundered millions of dollars of looted gold from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The three NGOs behind the [Stop Pillage Campaign](#), the Conflict Awareness Project, Open Society Justice Initiative, and TRIAL, call on the UK and Jersey Channel Island authorities to follow suit and swiftly investigate the two British firms which were the primary traders of the gold at issue in the case.

To date, the London-based *Hussar Services Limited* and the Jersey Channel Island-based *Hussar Limited*, as well as their corporate directors, have evaded accountability for their central role in the lucrative transnational “blood gold” enterprise alleged in the complaint in Switzerland.

“Until governments such as the UK and Jersey Channel Islands start to hold their own firms and businesspersons criminally liable for the pillage of Congo’s natural resources, war profiteers who aid and abet atrocities and human suffering will continue with impunity,” said **Kathi Lynn Austin**, Executive Director of the Conflict Awareness Project.

The same evidence that prompted the Swiss Prosecutor in charge of war crimes to open a criminal investigation against Argor-Heraeus SA has been made available to the UK and Jersey Channel Island authorities. Kathi Lynn Austin of the Conflict Awareness Project conducted the [investigation over a nine-year period](#) while the Open Society Justice Initiative provided the [blueprint for reviving the prosecution of pillage](#).

“We are heartened by the seriousness with which the Swiss authorities are pursuing the case as exemplified by this recent court ruling. We urge UK and Jersey Channel Island law enforcement authorities also to pursue their investigation into the matter as rapidly as possible and, if warranted, prosecute those they conclude to be guilty of these war crimes,” said **Ken Hurwitz** of the Open Society Justice Initiative.

The Swiss court ruling from 24 January 2014 upheld the right of the prosecutor to search the premises of Argor-Heraeus SA and seize documents and computers—which the federal police did on 4 November 2013. Stating that the strength of the evidence warranted such an action, the court rejected Argor’s subsequent legal challenge to the prosecutor’s right to conduct the search.

“The decision of the Swiss Federal Criminal Court corroborates what we have always believed: that very serious suspicions weigh on Argor-Heraeus SA. This decision will now allow the authorities to continue the investigation, the results of which we will await with great interest,” said **Bénédict De Moerloose**, lawyer in charge of the case at TRIAL.

The Swiss case is a milestone for international justice: for the first time since the immediate aftermath of WWII a corporation could be judged for complicity in the war crime of *pillage*.

For more information, see:

Stop Pillage Campaign website: www.Stop-Pillage.org

About the Swiss legal complaint filed by TRIAL: http://www.stop-pillage.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/STOP-PILLAGE_MEDIKIT_EN_light.pdf

CAP's report on the *Pillage of Congo Gold: A Case for the Prosecution of Corporate Crimes*: www.ConflictAwareness.org

OSJI's publication on *Corporate War Crimes: Prosecuting the Pillage of Natural Resources* www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/pillage-manual-2nd-edition-2011.pdf

Media Contacts:

TRIAL

Chloé Bitton, Communications Director
T : +41 22 321 61 10 |
M : +41 79.192.37.44
E : media@trial-ch.org
www.trial-ch.org

CAP

Greg Hittelman, Senior Consultant
T: +1 310 717 0606
E : ghittelman@conflictawareness.org
www.ConflictAwareness.org

OSJI

Jonathan Birchall, Communications Officer
T : +1 212 547 6958
M : +1 917 225 3346
E : jonathan.birchall@opensocietyfoundations.org
www.opensocietyfoundations.org