

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 16, 2021

The Honorable Janet Yellen
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Yellen:

We write to express our concern over reports we have read about the illicit trade in conflict gold out of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). According to research conducted by the United Nations Group of Experts on the DRC, the non-governmental organization The Sentry, and other public reports, key actors in this trade include Belgian gold tycoon Alain Goetz and his corporate network of gold refineries, as well as some of his chief rivals, including Sameer Bhimji and individuals associated with the UN-sanctioned company Uganda Commercial Impex. We want to express support for pursuing sanctions against these actors and any others engaged in the illicit gold trade in Central Africa.

The UN Group of Experts on DRC reported in 2020 that the volumes of gold smuggled out of the DRC “were significantly higher than the volumes of legally traded gold,” noting that, “the Congolese gold sector remained vulnerable to exploitation by armed groups and criminal networks and to unregulated trade.” Individuals and businesses engaging in the trade of illicit gold out of the DRC undermine the chances for peace and stability in the DRC, while robbing the people of their right to benefit from their country’s immense natural resource wealth. While middlemen and armed group commanders enrich themselves off the illicit gold trade in the DRC, millions of the country’s citizens have died as a result of conflicts since the 1990s; some 5 million Congolese people are currently internally displaced, nearly 1 million more are refugees in neighboring countries, and over 19 million are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. In FY20, the United States government provided \$332 million in assistance to the DRC. According to the UN, \$300 to \$600 million worth of gold is smuggled out of the DRC each year, providing the largest source of revenue to armed groups in the eastern DRC, where an estimated 3.3 to 7.6 million people have died because of ongoing conflict and instability.

Alain Goetz and his network of refineries that process illicitly sourced gold from the DRC in Uganda, Rwanda, and Dubai are the most influential network in the trade of conflict gold. Goetz has also been credibly linked to the laundering of \$300 million worth of gold from Venezuela through a refinery he established in Uganda, making him a significant actor in the global illicit gold trade and undermining a key U.S. foreign policy goal in the Western Hemisphere. Gold mined from conflict areas in the eastern DRC is reaching international markets, including the supply chains of major U.S. companies and in products that consumers use every day. In 2010, Congress included a provision in the Dodd Frank Wall Street Reform bill (Public Law 111-203)

dealing with the illicit mining and trade in conflict minerals, including gold, in funding violence in and around the DRC.

Sanctions on this network and others credibly accused of trading in illicit or illicitly mined gold in Central Africa would therefore not only have a positive impact on conflict resolution efforts in eastern DRC, but also on the illicit gold trade globally. We therefore urge you to hold these individuals and the companies they operate accountable for their actions by designating associated individuals and/or entities with Global Magnitsky or the DRC E.O. 13413, as amended by E.O. 13671, sanctions against them. Where feasible, the U.S. government should advocate parallel designations by the UN sanctions committee on the DRC given the repeated UN Group of Experts descriptions of Goetz-controlled companies and the conflict gold trade. Furthermore, we urge you to issue FinCEN advisories to alert financial institutions on conflict and high-risk gold from East and Central Africa, highlighting in particular the significant risks presented by the trade in illicit gold sourced in or transiting from the DRC, Uganda, and/or Rwanda to Dubai.

Thank you for your kind attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary, Department of State