

China's Minerals Mafia

A Global Pattern of Corruption,
Environmental Destruction, and Human
Rights Abuse

**THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
STRATEGIC COMPETITION
BETWEEN
THE UNITED STATES AND
THE CHINESE COMMUNIST
PARTY**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On February 18, 2025, tens of millions of liters of highly toxic mining waste spilled out of a poorly constructed tailings dam at a Chinese state-owned copper mine in Zambia, flooding nearby rivers and land with a heavy-metal, acidic slurry that killed fish, torched vegetation, and polluted drinking water. The immediate impact was visible and catastrophic, but the long-term impact on the environment and health and livelihoods of local villagers remains to be seen. This is not fiction and it was not an accident—it was the result of long-term negligence and non-compliance with environmental and safety regulations, the actions of a Chinese company that believed it could skirt the law. It is also not a one-off disaster—it is just one example of the global abuses of China’s Minerals Mafia.

This House Select Committee on China (Select Committee) investigative report details many, but not all, of the destructive practices of Chinese mining companies around the world. Following an investigation conducted over the past year into China’s quest to dominate the critical minerals market, the Select Committee determined these Chinese mining companies, under the guidance of the Chinese state, operate as a Minerals Mafia of sorts. The Mafia engages in a wide range of criminal activities, including extortion, trafficking, loan sharking, contract manipulation, and the use of intimidation and violence to maximize profits and exert control. In similar fashion, many Chinese mining companies engage in corrupt, illegal, and abusive practices in countries around the world to aid Beijing’s efforts to control the global critical mineral supply, including exploitation of weak and indebted governments, corrupt and predatory business practices, the use of forced and child labor, environmental destruction and degradation, illegal and unregulated mining, and community displacement.

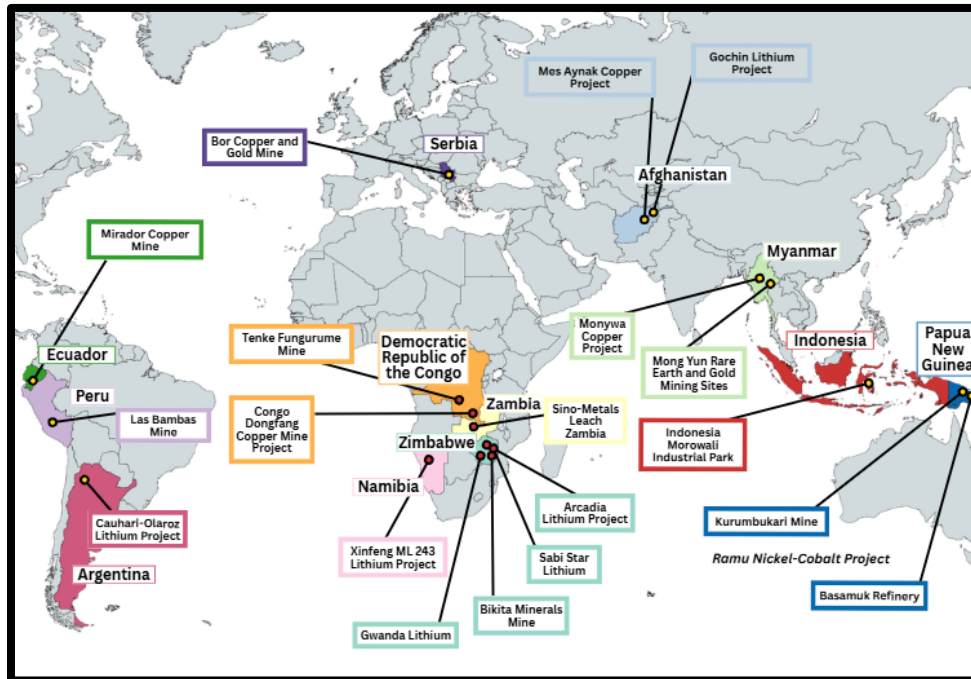
- **Part I** of this report details the February 2025 catastrophic collapse of the tailings dam at Sino-Metals Leach Zambia, a subsidiary of state-owned mining giant China Nonferrous Metal Mining Group, and subsequent attempts by the negligent Chinese company to cover up the scale of the disaster and silence victims. The Chinese mining company intimidated civil society organizations, attempted to bribe journalists, failed to adequately compensate those impacted, and tried to bury a nearly 400-page environmental assessment detailing the full horror of the

disaster. During its investigation, the Select Committee obtained that full environmental assessment and is publishing it in its entirety as Appendix A.

- **Part II** discusses Chinese exploitation of the lithium sector in Zimbabwe, a story of “unchecked extractivism” by Chinese companies at the expense of the environment and local communities and enabled by corruption and incapacity at all levels of government.

- **Part III** highlights a dozen shorter cases of reported malpractices by Chinese state-owned companies and other Chinese mining giants in countries around the world as seen on the map below, including labor abuses and environmental destruction in Serbia, use of child labor in Democratic Republic of Congo, disregard for worker safety in Indonesia, and unregulated mining and complicity with military atrocities in Burma.

China’s Mineral Mafia: Selected Examples of Global Abuse



Through these case studies, this report will demonstrate that these abusive actions by Chinese mining companies are part of a global pattern of exploitation and abuse.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of reports the Select Committee has published on the global critical minerals market. The first examined the People's Republic of China's (PRC), under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), coordinated, decades-long scheme to control the global supply of critical minerals through market manipulation.¹ The third report will examine efforts undertaken by the United States (U.S.) government to secure its own critical minerals supply chain. The purpose of this report is to expose abusive behavior around the globe by Chinese critical mineral mining companies, many of which are owned by or closely linked to the Chinese state.

The Select Committee acknowledges that the critical minerals mining industry has long faced challenges with environmental degradation, unsafe labor conditions, and exploitation of weak governments and regulatory gaps. There are notable historical failures by U.S. companies as well. There are, however, stark differences between the constraints and expectations that U.S. firms currently operate under and those of Chinese companies.

U.S. mining companies are generally privately held or publicly listed companies that operate under meaningful constraints and accountability mechanisms that drive higher operational standards, such as expectations from private investors, shareholder pressure, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) disclosure requirements, stock exchange listing rules, and exposure to litigation in their home jurisdictions. Moreover, when U.S. and other Western firms fail to live up to environmental and human rights standards, it can be the fault of the individual company executives, not government officials.

Chinese mining companies, on the other hand, operate either directly or indirectly at the behest of the Chinese state, which is focused on securing mineral supply chains regardless of the human or environmental cost. China's disregard for human and labor rights and the environment in its own country and abroad is well established.

During visits to Zambia and Zimbabwe, civil society organizations (CSOs) told Select Committee staff that U.S. and other Western companies, in contrast to Chinese companies, are known for adding value to local communities, including through building schools, houses, clinics, and roads, higher labor and safety standards, and better pay for workers.² Their preference for U.S. and other Western companies to develop the critical mineral resources in their communities was clear.

The unfortunate truth is that the more Chinese mining companies cut corners on environmental, labor, and human rights standards, lowering their cost of doing business, combined with the PRC's global market manipulation, the more difficult it is for U.S. and other Western companies to compete.

China's Minerals Mafia effectively exploits corrupt governments, weak regulatory environments, and opaque systems to achieve its aims. PRC investments and loans in developing countries buy influence, access, and leverage in obtaining mining licenses, skirting regulations, and protecting Chinese miners from accountability. At times, the Chinese government is directly complicit in establishing the conditions for abuse, such as through bilateral agreements or investments as part of its Belt-and-Road-Initiative (BRI). BRI is a Chinese state-led global infrastructure and investment program, launched in 2013, through which China has financed and built roads, ports, railways, and energy projects across Asia, Africa, and Latin America to secure Chinese access to critical resources and markets, while creating political leverage over recipient countries.³ In recent years, China has adapted its BRI approach, shifting from lending money directly to host-countries for major infrastructure projects to lending to Chinese companies, which then implement critical mineral and manufacturing projects in host countries.⁴ In 2025 alone, China invested approximately \$32.6 billion USD in the metals and minerals sector in BRI countries—and well more than \$150 billion USD since 2013, according to an analysis by Griffith Asia Institute.⁵

As just one example, China convinced Serbia, a BRI country, as part of a bilateral trade deal, to not inspect or enforce Serbian labor laws in Chinese-owned companies, factories, and worksites, even with credible allegations of forced labor and exploitation.⁶ Li Qiang, head of China Labor Watch, asserts that China's decisive source of global competitive advantage lies in its weak labor protections, which systematically lower

cost through lax enforcement, extended working hours, and wage suppression.⁷

China's engagement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) over the last 20 years is illustrative of China's Minerals Mafia playbook. In what is now ironically known as the "deal of the century," DRC signed a series of minerals-for-infrastructure deals with two Chinese state-owned enterprises: the construction giant China Railway Group Ltd (CREC) and Sinohydro, which built China's Three Gorges Dam in 2007 and 2008.⁸ The Chinese partners promised the DRC \$3 billion USD in much-needed infrastructure, including railways, roads, and hospitals, in exchange for mining rights to vast deposits of cobalt and copper in southeastern DRC valued at approximately \$93 billion USD,⁹ and 68% of a joint mining venture with the DRC's state mining firm, called Sino-Congolaise des mines (Sicomines).¹⁰ The Chinese also agreed to invest about \$9 billion USD in upfront development costs, essentially amounting to a loan that already heavily indebted DRC would have to pay back through mining proceeds or other means.¹¹ This was later renegotiated to \$6 billion USD due to international outcry from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and others.¹²

The deal did not go as planned for the DRC. Instead of investments in critical infrastructure, the deal "became a vehicle for fraud, bribery, and the enrichment of powerful elites", according to New Lines Institute.¹³ In 2023, the head of the Congolese Inspector General of Finance found that over 15 years, only \$822 million USD was spent on infrastructure, and this figure was also likely inflated.¹⁴ In the same period, Chinese companies reportedly earned approximately \$10 billion USD in profits.¹⁵ An independent investigation by The Sentry also exposed deep-seated corruption related to the deal, with leaked documents showing funds channeled through shell companies and bank accounts linked to political elites.¹⁶

Almost 20 years after the first deal was inked, China's investments and relationships with political elites bought it access to mining rights, often through contracts that are never made public but guarantee them right of first refusal on mineral exports, according to New Lines Institute.¹⁷ DRC produces 80 percent of the world's cobalt, and Chinese state-owned enterprises and policy banks now control 80 percent of the total output.¹⁸ Chinese mining companies are linked to appalling and

widespread human rights abuses, child labor, and environmental destruction throughout the country.¹⁹ In 2021, the DRC's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative multi-stakeholder group called the deal with China "an unprecedented harm in the history of the DRC" – an incredible statement considering the scourge of slavery, poverty, and conflict throughout DRC's history.²⁰

The terms of the original deal have been renegotiated many times, as the DRC has sought to claw back value from its critical mineral resources, including in January 2024 when the original Chinese partners pledged a new \$7 billion USD to build the types of key infrastructure that they failed to provide in the first place, along with an annual royalty payment of 1.2%.²¹ The DRC is now looking to the United States for a better model. In 2025, the two countries signed a strategic partnership agreement that is designed to improve governance and transparency in the DRC's mining sector and give U.S. persons and aligned persons a right of first offer for certain projects.²²

Warning: This report contains graphic images that may be upsetting for some readers. Some visuals depict violent scenes, human rights abuses, and the impacts of environmental disasters. If you are sensitive to such content, please use caution when viewing the report.

PART I: SINO-METALS DISASTER IN ZAMBIA

This report starts with a case study of a catastrophic Chinese mining disaster that ravaged the Zambian countryside in February 2025. Tens of millions of liters of acidic and toxic mining waste burst onto land and into river, leaving at least 700,000 residents without water. Instead of acting as a responsible corporate citizen, Sino-Metals—a Chinese mining company—intimidated civil society organizations (CSOs), attempted to bribe journalists, failed to adequately compensate those impacted, and tried to bury a nearly 400-page environmental assessment detailing the full horror of the disaster. During the course of its investigation, the Select Committee obtained that full environmental assessment and is publishing it in its entirety as Appendix A. The Zambian government did little to push back on Sino-Metals for fear of retaliation by Beijing. Sino-Metals is expanding its operations throughout Zambia.

While in Zambia, Select Committee staff visited the Mingomba copper exploration site of KoBold Metals, a U.S. company. KoBold’s approach to gaining the approval and trust of the local community offered a meaningful contrast to the actions of Sino-Metals. Among other things, the company’s model—led by its Zambian-born CEO—of bringing value to the local community through hiring local staff and sourcing 90% of its goods and services from local businesses, thus marrying the success of the mine to economic growth in the community, was a marked difference from concerns that staff heard from CSOs and business groups in Zambia about Chinese mining companies sub-contracting to Chinese companies and importing Chinese workers.

Catastrophic Tailings Dam Collapse at Chinese Mine

On February 18, 2025, the tailings dam at Sino-Metals Leach Zambia’s (Sino-Metals) copper mining site in Chambishi, Zambia collapsed, spilling tens of millions of liters of acidic and highly toxic mining waste into the environment.²³ The heavy-metal slurry polluted the land, rivers, and tributaries of the Kafue River ecosystem—beginning with the nearby Chambishi Stream, continuing into the Mwambishi River, and finally flowing into the Kafue River, Zambia’s most important waterway.²⁴

As seen in satellite imagery, shown below, the immediate impact of the spill was catastrophic.



These Planet satellite images from February 18 (left) and February 23 (right) show the Sino-Metals tailings dam before and after the spill. On the bottom right, the flow of toxic waste from the dam can clearly be seen making its way through the Chambishi Stream area (Planet).

The Kafue River basin, including the Mwambishi River, is a critical resource for 60% of Zambia's population, providing drinking water, irrigation for crops, a source for fishing, and water for industry.²⁵ The acidic sludge from the tailings dam reportedly lowered the pH levels at points in the Mwambashi River to as low as 1, "so corrosive it could reportedly dissolve human bones."²⁶ Soil and water sources were contaminated. Local authorities were forced to shut off water supplies to the nearby city of Kitwe, leaving its 700,000 residents without access to clean water.²⁷ Crops in the path of the acid river were destroyed, with images showing the acid-seared path.²⁸ Fish and other aquatic life in the river died in mass numbers within hours, with reports of dead fish floating up on the banks of the river more than 60 miles downstream from the mine.²⁹ Birds and wildlife disappeared.³⁰



These images taken from a video on Feb. 19, 2025, show the path of mine waste in a river from the tailing dam breach at Sino-Metals Leach Zambia, and dead fish in the Kafue River near the town of Luanshya, Zambia (Richard Kille/AP)

The amount of toxic waste spilled into the environment was not initially clear and has been hotly disputed. Initially, Sino-Metals estimated the amount of toxic waste spilled as 50 million liters (50,000 tons) of toxic waste.³¹ An independent environmental consultant later calculated the spill size at 1.5 million tons—30 times greater than the amount reported by the company—which would make the spill the “sixth-worst mining disaster in history”, according to U.S. Ambassador to Zambia Michael Gonzales.³²

More than a year later, while the river shows signs of recovery, the fields around the mine remain barren, the livelihoods of hundreds of farmers have been destroyed, and the long-term consequences of this environmental disaster on the land and health of the people around the mine are unknown.



These images, taken by Drizit Environmental Zambia, show maize and peanut fields burnt by the acid flow in the Chambishi Stream area (Drizit).

Sino-Metals' Negligence Causes Dam Collapse

Sino-Metals' negligence, enabled by the Zambian Government's corruption and complicity, led to the collapse of its tailings dam, encapsulated by an array of failures identified by Zambian regulators including fundamental design flaws and non-compliance with regulations.³³ Furthermore, the Zambian Government knew the tailings dam was at risk of failure years before it collapsed, and took no known action to force structural repairs, according to knowledgeable individuals.³⁴

Sino-Metals Leach Zambia is a copper mining enterprise in Chambishi, Zambia—a town of about 11,000 in the Copperbelt Province. It is a subsidiary of China Nonferrous Metal Mining Group (CNMC), a Chinese state-owned mining giant.³⁵ The site includes, among other things, the Mwambashi copper mine and the Chambishi Leach Plant.³⁶ According to public reporting, Sino-Metals has operated the Chambishi Leach Plant at the site since 2006, initially processing copper from waste left by earlier mining activities.³⁷

In 2017, Sino-Metals invested \$70 million to expand the Mwambashi mine, with the goal of producing 10,000 tons of copper cathodes annually.³⁸ Prior to the spill, Sino-Metals reportedly had the capacity to produce about 8,000 metric tons of copper cathode and 4,000 tons of copper concentrate annually from its Mwambashi mine,³⁹ accounting for about 1.5% of Zambia's overall copper production in 2024.⁴⁰

Sino-Metals' Chambishi site is a vertically integrated mining operation, meaning that the company both digs up copper ore and turns it into finished copper metal onsite through a multi-step, chemical-heavy process.⁴¹ The process generally proceeds as below.⁴²

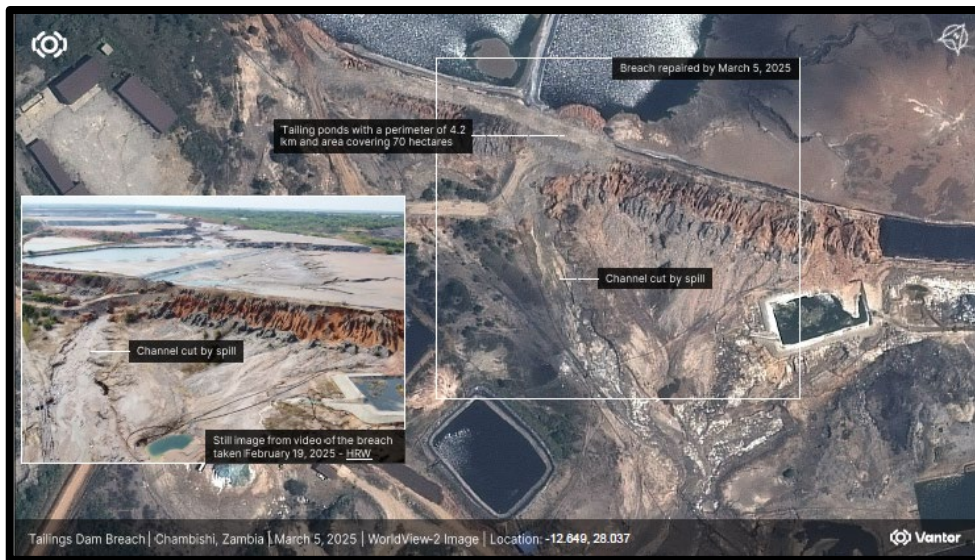
- *First*, Sino-Metals "strips" a reported 1.5 million cubic meters of waste rock from the Mwambashi mine each year. This rock must be removed to get the copper ore body beneath.
- *Second*, once the ore body is exposed, the mine extracts copper-ore from the pit. Sino-Metals' Mwambashi operations yield a reported 500,000 tons of copper ore annually.⁴³
- *Third*, the copper ore must be crushed, ground, and processed to reveal the copper minerals. Copper ore contains low percentages of actual copper minerals, typically less than 1%, so

most of the ore becomes waste rock.⁴⁴ To separate the minerals, most copper mines, including Sino-Metals, use a process referred to as flotation. Simply put, flotation uses a slurry of chemical reagents and air bubbles to reveal and recover copper particles, referred to as copper concentrate.

- *Fourth*, Sino-Metals uses chemical solutions to “leach” higher-grade copper from the copper concentrate, turning it into a solution.
- *Fifth*, solvents are applied to the copper solution to purify it before electrowinning, which extracts the copper from the solution and plates it into pure copper cathodes.⁴⁵

The slurry of chemical reagents, leach residue, and other waste left behind from this multi-stage production process is then stored in engineered structures called *tailings dams*, or tailings storage facilities. Tailings storage facilities can contain multiple separate dams, cells, or compartments within a larger structure, such as at Sino-Metals.

The catastrophic spill of February 18, 2025 occurred when multiple Sino-Metals’ tailings dams, or cells, collapsed.⁴⁶ *The Daily Maverick*, an independent South African news organization, described the unfolding catastrophe. “Internal erosion—known as piping—developed through a divisional wall between two upper compartments of the facility. Gradually, this erosion weakened the structure until the wall collapsed, sending water and tailings into a lower, inactive compartment. That lower compartment lacked adequate buffer space meant to absorb surges and quickly overtopped. The resulting cascade eventually breached the outer containment wall, releasing more than 50 million liters of acidic waste into the Mwambashi River.”⁴⁷



The images above show the breach in the tailings dam (left inset) and then dam after breach repairs had been made (right) (Vantor).

In the days following the spill, the Engineering Institution of Zambia (EIZ), which regulates engineering practices in Zambia, sent a team to investigate the collapse. EIZ found potential flaws in the dam’s design, approval, and operational process, stating that “storing large volumes of concentrated acid in an inadequately secured dam point to potential negligence and flawed operational processes.”⁴⁸ EIZ’s investigative team “observed cracks, uncompacted walls, and inconsistent wall thickness” raising concerns about the integrity of the structure.⁴⁹ EIZ also questioned whether the dam facility was operated by qualified and licensed engineers, noted that records of inspections, maintenance, and structural monitoring appeared incomplete or nonexistent, and cited a broader issue of non-compliance with safety regulations and best practices at Sino-Metals Leach Zambia Limited.⁵⁰

The post-spill investigation was not the first indication of structural concerns at Sino-Metals. In 2016, Sino-Metals was one of several mining companies investigated by the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) for polluting the Kafue River, and subsequent government reports and inspections highlighted the instability of its tailings dam.⁵¹

A 2017 borehole study by Copperbelt University reportedly found groundwater contamination near the Sino-Metals tailings facilities, indicating that its tailings structures were already in a weakened state.⁵²

Yet, when Sino-Metals expanded the Mwambishi Mine in 2017, instead of constructing a new tailings storage facility, Sino-Metals is alleged to have just raised the walls of the existing containment structures.⁵³

Furthermore, court documents allege that Sino-Metals has a history of noncompliance with Zambia's Environmental Management Act and regulatory directives, including a 2023 Compliance Order from ZEMA to Sino-Metals because the company had failed to appropriately maintain the conditions of its tailings dams and failed to treat the effluent of its tailings dam before discharging it from its leaching plant into the tailings dam.⁵⁴ A Zambian business leader also told Select Committee staff that pollution from Sino-Metals was a concern prior to the February 2025 disaster, and that he had sent letters to both Sino-Metals and ZEMA expressing those concerns, but no actions were taken.⁵⁵

Moreover, there had been warnings issued broadly to the mining sector in Zambia about the risks of poorly managed tailings facilities in the Copperbelt region, including by a 2014 Auditor-General report flagging mismanagement at multiple Copperbelt tailings sites, uncontrolled effluent leaks, and weak regulatory enforcement by ZEMA.⁵⁶

Sino-Metals and the Zambian Government Downplayed the Severity of the Spill

Initially following the spill, Sino-Metals publicly sought to downplay and suppress the severity of the disaster, including failing to provide information to the public and the Government that could have helped people understand the potential dangers. Statements from the Government of Zambia indicate that it was uncertain about the scope of the pollution, alternating between messages of assurance to the public, new safety alerts and demands to the Chinese miners to clean up the after-effects of the spill. While the damage to the surrounding areas was plain to the eye, it would be weeks before independent groups began to report the results of scientific sampling and assessments.

Immediately after the spill, the Government of Zambia and Sino-Metals reportedly took an array of containment actions, such as shutting down operations at the mine, making repairs to the breached dam wall, shutting off the water supply to affected communities, monitoring water quality, and dumping hundreds of tons of lime into the rivers to neutralize the acid and restore balance.⁵⁷ On February 21, 2025, ZEMA

issued Sino-Metals an Environmental Restoration Order, directing it to clean up affected areas, assess the extent of environmental damage, and submit a comprehensive remediation plan.⁵⁸ This order also required Sino-Metals to hire an independent consultant to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to define the scope of the pollution.⁵⁹

In a video posted to ZNBC's twitter account on February 28, 2025, Sino-Metals issued an apology to Zambian President Hakainde Hichelma, acknowledged the scale of the disaster, and assured the public that the water supply had been returned to normal.⁶⁰ In this video Sino-Metals Chairman Zhang Peiwen said, "The water supply in Kitwe has been fully restored to normal and the water quality testing data is at normal standards."⁶¹ Piewen may have been referring specifically to treated water from Nkana Water Supply and Sanitation Company, though this was not clear. Statements from government ministers around this time indicated that the pH levels of the drinking water supply from the Ipusukilo Water Treatment Plant in Kitwe had returned to normal range, though acknowledged that untreated water—such as that in the rivers used to water crops or livestock or in wells—was not safe.⁶² At that time, a full environmental assessment of the region's water sources had not yet been conducted, and later environmental testing would show that much of the region's water still presented dangers. Nevertheless, in August 2025, a Zambian Government official gave a farcical interview underplaying the effects of the spill, even theatrically drinking from a cup of water on-camera to demonstrate how "safe" it was to drink the water from the Kafue River. The public response was immediate, with netizens questioning if the official drank water from the actual spill site, or if it was merely a hoax, a bottled water stunt staged to assuage public concerns with disregard for the actual toxicity levels of the river.⁶³

Not long after the spill, EPSE Oy Ltd, a Finnish environmental company took a water sample from the Sino-Metals tailings pond and found that it contained 16 heavy metals that exceeded the World Health Organization's (WHO) safety threshold values including nickel, lead, arsenic, zinc and uranium.⁶⁴ It reportedly warned the Zambian government and Sino-Metals in April about the potential health impacts due to the dangerous levels of heavy metals present, given that these metals in the tailings pond are the same that were spilled into the environment.⁶⁵

On April 2, amid increasing international pressure, the Zambian Ministry of Fisheries and Wildlife suspended fishing activities in the Kafue River based on findings from Zambia's Central Veterinary Research Institute (CVRI) and the University of Zambia's School of Veterinary Medicine, which confirmed that heavy metal contamination in the river was far beyond safe limits set by the WHO and Zambia's Food and Agriculture Organization.⁶⁶

Sino-Metals Covers Up Damning Environmental Assessment

On March 29, 2025, nearly six weeks after the spill, Sino-Metals contracted Drizit Zambia (Drizit), an environmental management company,⁶⁷ to conduct a two-month independent environmental impact assessment of the spill area.⁶⁸ Drizit reported that it employed a multidisciplinary team of geoscientists, hazmat specialists, and field staff to take 3,500 samples of the surface water, groundwater, and soil, in multiple rounds at different times, in both the immediate fallout area affecting the Chambishi and Mwambashi river systems, and downstream in and along the Kafue River.⁶⁹

Upon completing its field work, Drizit called a meeting on April 23, 2025 with representatives of Sino-Metals and ZEMA to discuss its findings, according to public reporting of court documents.⁷⁰ Drizit reportedly presented damning findings of the severity of the pollution, and recommended that hundreds of people be relocated from the pollution "hot zone" until a full-scale clean-up could be completed.⁷¹ Later, Drizit reported in a public statement that it subsequently submitted written reports to Sino-Metals on the severity of the spill-related pollution and associated risks to the local communities and environment.⁷² Before Drizit's report could be finalized and the results made public, Sino-Metals terminated Drizit's contract on the day before the final report was due, preventing the release of its report.

On June 3, concerned that Sino-Metals and the Government of Zambia had suppressed its findings, Drizit Group CEO Douglas Carmody sent a non-public letter to the Republic of Zambia, calling for immediate action to address the "large-scale environmental catastrophe" caused by Sino-Metals.⁷³ According to the letter, which the Select Committee obtained and is publishing as Appendix B, Drizit's assessment found:

- Over 1.5 million tons of waste material had spilled—a shocking 30 times what Sino-Metals had previously reported.
- 900,000 tons of toxic tailings containing dangerous levels of cyanide, arsenic, copper, zinc, lead, chromium, cadmium, and other pollutants were still present in the environment, continuously leaching hazardous pollutants into the soil and groundwater.
- Nearly 800 individuals were residing within close proximity to the fallout zone, many of whom are exposed daily to hazardous materials which could pose profound long-term health risks, including organ damage, birth defects, and cancer.⁷⁴

Further, Carmody alleged that Sino-Metals “actively sought to disrupt the assessment process” and “made attempts to influence the outcomes” of Drizit’s findings, noting that Drizit had “never encountered a polluter that has demonstrated such a lack of remorse or accountability.”⁷⁵



Images taken by Drizit show some of the reported 900,000 cubic meters of toxic tailings materials (left) and an acid-affected fishpond on the banks of the Chambishi Stream, which had observed pH levels of 2.7 (right) (Drizit).

The June 3 letter also stated that 500 pages of Drizit’s detailed technical findings had been submitted to ZEMA.⁷⁶ Failing to acknowledge or act on Drizit’s findings, the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment announced on June 17, 2025, that it would be taking over the environmental assessment process due to a “contractual dispute” between Drizit and Sino-Metals.⁷⁷ Later, in August 2025, Green Economy and Environment Minister Mike Mposha declined to comment on Drizit’s findings, claiming that he had never received Drizit’s report officially.⁷⁸ This statement ignores both the fact that the Government of Zambia

reportedly had access to Drizit’s findings as early as late April 2025, and that Sino-Metals’ efforts to cover up Drizit’s findings are what prevented an “official” report from being finalized in the first place.⁷⁹

Drizit subsequently sued Sino-Metals for final payment of nearly \$3.5 million.⁸⁰ Drizit alleges that Sino-Metals was angered both by its findings and that Drizit had shared those findings with government regulators, subsequently issuing a notice of breach and terminating the contract without justification.⁸¹ Sino-Metals later countersued Drizit on October 14, 2025, accusing the firm of fraudulent misrepresentation, incompetence, breach of contract, and breach of confidentiality, according to public reporting.⁸² Drizit has also accused ZEMA of breach of statutory duty for failing to review, approve, and act on the submitted reports and for not responding to formal requests for water and soil quality standards applicable in mining areas in Zambia, according to public reporting of Drizit’s court case.⁸³

After Sino-Metals sought to publicly tarnish Drizit’s credibility, Drizit released a public statement in August 2025 that responded to Sino-Metals’ allegations and reiterated the findings from its June 3 letter to the government, making public for the first time the true scope of the Sino-Metals disaster.⁸⁴

Two Environmental Assessments, Similarly Damning Findings, Delayed Justice

After shelving Drizit’s assessment and suppressing its findings, the Government of Zambia held a public bid process and awarded a new contract to an unknown Zambian company, Applied Science and Technology Associates (Applied Science) to conduct *another* environmental assessment in September 2025—seven months after the initial pollution and after commencement of the rainy season.⁸⁵ The findings of this assessment were finally released publicly on January 6, 2026, nearly 11 months after the disaster.⁸⁶

Drizit’s Assessment

The Select Committee obtained a copy of Drizit’s nearly 400-page draft environmental assessment, dated May 2025, which was kept from the public, covered-up by Sino-Metals, and ignored by the Zambian government.⁸⁷ The Select Committee also reviewed Applied Science’s publicly released report. While we did not attempt to comprehensively

analyze the scientific methodologies employed by either company or the differences in the findings, it is noteworthy that the two companies, who collected samples many months apart, came to some similar conclusions about the severity of the disaster and the need for urgent action.

The Drizit report, in addition to scientifically detailing the scale and severity of the disaster, contains dozens of photos showing the damage to crops and waterways from the spill. Overall, Drizit found “significant environmental, health, and socio-economic impacts resulting from the spill affecting river systems and surrounding communities” including “notable spatial variability and contamination in rivers and dug wells, with elevated levels of sulphates, heavy metals (like arsenic and cobalt), and low pH, particularly near inhabited areas and downstream of the spill site.”⁸⁸ In general, Drizit’s water analyses found the highest levels of dangerous contamination of harmful metals and other constituents within one kilometer of the tailings dam, there were other points along the path of the flow where Drizit also found concerning spikes.⁸⁹

Drizit’s soil analysis found statistically significant levels of harmful constituents (i.e., tailings) at many sample sites throughout the region, suggesting that contaminants would continue to leach into surface waters, as well as low pH levels in the soil.⁹⁰ It posited that the low pH soils, along with the harmful contaminants from the spill could lead to long-term consequences including reduced soil fertility, health hazards from direct contact and airborne particles, and continued degradation of aquatic systems.⁹¹ This contamination was found to be concentrated in the Chambishi stream area immediately downstream of the mining operations, with gradually decreasing concentrations in the Mwambashi and Kafue Rivers.⁹²

Drizit identified at least 749 households along the Chambishi Stream and Mwambishi River whose daily lives, agriculture, and livestock were significantly disrupted by the spill.⁹³ These households relied directly on 92 different water sources contaminated by the spill (e.g., dug wells, boreholes, surface water bodies), 34 of which were ultimately abandoned due to reported animal illness or death, crop damage or loss, and human health concerns.⁹⁴ Some communities also experienced health issues (e.g., itching, respiratory, and gastrointestinal symptoms) linked to water contamination.⁹⁵



The images from Vantor above show the impact, with false color imaging, of the spill on vegetation on March 5 (top) and May 30 (below). In the bottom image, the continued impacts of the spill on vegetation are clearly seen months later (Vantor).

Applied Science's Assessment

The nearly 500-page Applied Science Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) report was submitted to ZEMA on December 19, 2025, and released to the public in early January 2026.⁹⁶ In the report, Applied Science acknowledges that conducting field work eight months after the spill significantly limited its ability to directly measure the short-term impacts of the spill.⁹⁷ The assessment suffered from other key shortcomings, according to knowledgeable individuals, notably,

reaffirming Sino-Metals' claim regarding the volume of the spill (Sino-Metals claimed the spill released only 50,000 tons as opposed to Drizit's finding, which assessed the volume of the mine tailing spill to be 1.5 million tons).⁹⁸ Additionally, the Applied Science assessment collected fewer samples than the Drizit assessment,⁹⁹ assessed a more limited number of contaminants (excluding uranium),¹⁰⁰ reported mean values (rather than the actual values) of the contaminants,¹⁰¹ omitted sampling protocols and laboratory tests, and included repeated obfuscations of Sino-Metals' responsibility—citing historical mining activity in the region.¹⁰²

With these shortcomings in mind, the Applied Sciences report states that, while the Chambishi Stream, Mwambashi River and Kafue River were significantly impacted by the slurry from the tailings dam as indicated by low pH, and elevated metals and sulphates in the water, more recent analysis shows that the water quality has returned to its pre-incident levels.¹⁰³ The report posits that this restoration could be both from the dosing of the water with lime and sodium after the incident and dilution of the contaminants due to inflow of tributaries and rain.¹⁰⁴

However, ESIA still found many significant lasting impacts from Sino-Metals' negligence, including contaminated subsurface and topsoil and toxic metals in river sediment that continue to harm plant and animal life and endanger crops in specific areas along the path of the spill.¹⁰⁵ In particular, the assessment identified a core area of approximately 5.35 kilometers that still exhibits elevated levels of heavy metals in soil, creating risks for plant, animal, and agricultural health.¹⁰⁶ Among other things, the study also raised concerns that the heavy metals in the surface water, soils, and food crops, likely increased risks for cancer and non-cancer health issues for certain local populations.¹⁰⁷ The ESIA repeatedly posited that some contamination in the environment was likely also due to longer-term pollution from mining activities beyond the tailings dam disaster—ostensibly some of it from Sino-Metals as well, given the location.¹⁰⁸

Like Drizit, the company recommended that individuals within the critical impact zone be relocated—eight months after Drizit's first urgent calls for such actions were ignored.¹⁰⁹ Applied Science's report details the complexity of the population living around the mines, which it said

includes squatters, agricultural tenants, and other individuals “entangled” in informal and illegal land markets.¹¹⁰

Applied Science also made a series of other recommendations for remediation and restoration of the physical environment, soil and ecological rehabilitation, health surveillance for local communities, and targeted support for communities including compensation packages.¹¹¹ Additionally, it recommended that Sino-Metals improve its tailings management practices and the Zambian government strengthen governance and compliance in the mining sector. On December 30, 2025, ZEMA issued an amended Environmental Restoration Order directing Sino-Metals to commence clean-up, remediation, and restoration work in line with the findings and recommendations of the ESIA, and to have it completed by June 30, 2026, according to public reporting.¹¹²

It remains to be seen whether Sino-Metals will fully comply with this latest of several Environmental Restoration Orders that the Government of Zambia has directed towards the company. Regardless, justice for those most harmed by the Sino-Metals disaster has been inarguably delayed by Sino-Metals’ suppression of the first independent environmental assessment.

Sino-Metals, Zambian Government Intimidated CSOs and Suppressed Reporting of Disaster

Just as Sino-Metals and the Zambian Government covered up Drizit’s assessment, the company and its affiliates have also reportedly sought to prevent CSOs, independent journalists, and lawyers from speaking with victims affected by the disaster or visiting the mining area.¹¹³

Select Committee staff spoke with representatives from several Zambian CSOs who said that individuals acting on behalf of Sino-Metals have harassed CSOs to prevent them from speaking out about the severity of the disaster and the failure of the company and government to respond effectively.¹¹⁴ There were about 30 organizations initially that were coordinating advocacy efforts after the spill, but that number has dropped to only about five organizations as of January 2026, as the pressure effectively silenced the others.¹¹⁵ If CSOs try to travel to the mining area to meet with community members or take photographs, advocates told Select Committee staff that law enforcement or mining police force them to leave.¹¹⁶ Some have reportedly been arrested.¹¹⁷ This

has left the communities most affected by the spill isolated and alone, without anyone to speak for them.¹¹⁸

Affiliates of Sino-Metals and the Zambian Government have also reportedly tried to silence journalists from reporting on the disaster. On May 2025, a privately owned news organization in Zambia called News Diggers shared a [trailer](#) on Facebook for its film “Chinese Investment in Zambia: The Good, The Bad and the Dangerous,” which highlighted environmental and labor abuses by Chinese companies, including Sino-Metals.¹¹⁹ After the trailer came out, the Select Committee was told that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce tried to prevent the release of the film.¹²⁰ When that effort failed, bribes were offered to remove any negative material about the Chinese government or Chinese investment in Zambia. Finally, the Chinese Chamber sued News Diggers to prevent its release, and the Lusaka High Court responded with an interim injunction on May 22, the day before the film was set to be broadcast.¹²¹ The High Court finally lifted the injunction on July 18, 2025, and the [documentary](#) aired in full on July 29.¹²² Additionally, several journalists have been detained or arrested by Zambian police for attempting to visit the Sino-Metals mining area or to meet with villagers impacted by the disaster, according to public reporting and a trusted contact.¹²³ Select Committee staff also learned that Zambian Police detained victims in the affected area.¹²⁴

Sino-Metals Fails to Fully Compensate and Relocate Affected Individuals

More than a year after the spill, those farming the land near the spill report that the crops are not growing, and the land is no longer usable.¹²⁵ Dialogue Earth described “failed crops, decaying maize fields, and vegetables abandoned in acidic, waterlogged soil,” after a September 2025 visit to villages near Kitwe and Chambishi.”¹²⁶ Yet, the victims of the spill have received limited compensation, and no transparent action has been taken on the relocations, according to public reporting.¹²⁷ Under Zambia’s environmental framework and polluter-pays principle, Sino-Metals is responsible for both funding environmental restoration and compensating victims, including relocation.¹²⁸

Immediately after the spill, with their crops destroyed or tainted, and drinking water contaminated, impoverished families in the path of the spill quickly grew hungry and thirsty.¹²⁹ Within a week, many victims

were provided some limited relief from Sino-Metals and local authorities.¹³⁰ Accounts vary, but victims reportedly received daily rations of water, a 25-kilogram bag of maize meal each month, 2.5 liters of cooking oil, and 500 kwacha, or about \$21.70 USD.¹³¹ On its Facebook page, Sino-Metals announced regular deliveries of food and water to affected individuals.¹³² However, residents told reporters that monthly ration deliveries lasted no more than a week.¹³³ These meager offerings were intended to hold victims over until they were given more robust compensation packages from Sino-Metals.

The Zambian government ordered Sino-Metals to compensate individuals affected by the spill,¹³⁴ and on July 31, Sino-Metals announced that it had begun doing so based on a plan approved by the Zambian government.¹³⁵ By September 2025, Vice President of Zambia Mutale-Nalumango reported that Sino-Metals had paid out a total of about 14 million kwacha, or approximately \$592,000 USD at the time,¹³⁶ to affected individuals, for damage to livestock, land, and crops.¹³⁷ Applied Science later provided details on these payouts, noting that the Copperbelt Provincial Ministries of Agriculture and Fisheries and Livestock identified a combined 481 individuals, households, and farms that should be compensated for the impacts to their livelihoods, at a total of 14,129,435 kwacha—but given the suppression of Drizit’s assessment, these numbers were formulated long before a comprehensive environment and social impact assessment had been completed.¹³⁸

Victims of the spill and those who represent them, including CSOs and attorneys, have ridiculed the compensation payments, calling them “woefully inadequate,”¹³⁹ and a “drop in the ocean.”¹⁴⁰ Affected residents reportedly received payouts ranging from \$17 and \$2,000 USD, far less than the damage they experienced.¹⁴¹

Worse still, Sino-Metals reportedly manipulated impoverished victims of the spill, who had lost their livelihoods months prior, into signing away future claims. Many who received payouts were reportedly made to sign “Deed of Settlement and Release” agreements, stating that Sino-Metals was making the payment “as full and final settlement of all claims arising from any damage, injury, or inconvenience” experienced as a result of the spill.¹⁴² By signing, the affected individual “accepts and acknowledges” that the amount they received is “full and final settlement of all claims.”¹⁴³ Several CSOs told

Select Committee staff that victims of the spill were given a document to sign, agreeing to compensation, but it was not translated into their language and many did not know or understand what they were signing, nor did they understand their rights.¹⁴⁴

These agreements also demanded silence from the villagers. According to agreements reviewed by the *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)*, villagers were asked to accept payment only if they agreed not to speak publicly about the spill or the settlements.¹⁴⁵ One farmer told WSJ that Sino-Metals representatives offered her a one-time payment of \$150 USD, along with a monthly allotment of 11 pounds of cornmeal, in exchange for a pledge never to discuss the disaster, which the Zambian government has said rendered her half-acre plot unfarmable for three years.¹⁴⁶ The officials forbade her from telling others about the nondisclosure agreement itself and made her promise to never pursue legal action.¹⁴⁷ Local activists told the paper that these terms were the same for all victims who receive payment.¹⁴⁸

Others who have been impacted said that they have not received payments at all. Representatives for the victims told Select Committee staff that they have no idea what formula was used to determine the amount of compensation or who should receive it.¹⁴⁹ For example, Dialogue Earth spoke with one farmer who reportedly used to earn 5,000 kwacha (\$208 USD) per week from her vegetable plots, which she irrigated from the Mwambashi River.¹⁵⁰ According to Dialogue Earth, “She grew fresh herbs, leeks, cabbage, tomatoes, carrots and peppers – enough to support her six children and two grandchildren. Today, her fields are bare, and the family lives on her husband’s salary of just 1,000 kwacha (\$42 USD) per month from China Harvest Farms, a wheat and vegetable farm. They have not yet been listed for compensation.”¹⁵¹

The Government of Zambia has publicly lauded Sino-Metals for the limited compensation provided to date but left open the possibility for further compensation. In September 2025, Vice President Mutale-Nalumango stated that “Compensation must be guided by thorough and independent assessment. If the damage to the land and livelihoods proves to be more extensive or long-lasting than initially understood, then further compensation will be necessary and it will be pursued.”¹⁵² However, it is still not clear what form such an independent assessment

will take or how committed the Government of Zambia is to ensuring that this will occur.

Following Chinese Premier Li Qiang’s November 19-20, 2025 visit to Zambia, marking the first high-level visit in 28 years and announcing a \$1.4 billion investment to revitalize the Tazara railway, Vice President Nalumango visited China on November 26, 2025 and participated in a scripted meeting where Sino-Metals representative Wang Jingjun formally apologized to the Zambian Government – not to the victims – and requested that Sino-Metals be allowed to operate again.¹⁵³ Nalumango “welcomed the apology,” and rather than shining a spotlight on the magnitude of damages suffered by Zambian victims, many of whom remained to be compensated, Nalumango instead “reaffirmed Zambia’s commitment to protecting investors,” while promising a team of ministers would review and validate the safety report before making a decision.¹⁵⁴ Netizens responded that the Sino-Metals apology should have instead been to victims.¹⁵⁵

In January 2026, a Zambian Government official told Select Committee staff that all victims of the spill had already been compensated, a statement that representatives of the victims vigorously denied.¹⁵⁶

Moreover, as of February 2026, a year after the spill and ten months after Drizit’s first urgent calls, the victims living in the worst affected areas along the Chambishi Stream have still not been relocated,¹⁵⁷ nor has a relocation plan been publicly communicated, according to recent investigative reporting.¹⁵⁸



Home within the Chambishi Stream area, surrounded by acid-burned maize (Drizit); Farmer in the Chambishi Stream area with his destroyed crops (Tsolofelo Miladzi/Dialogue Earth).¹⁵⁹

Multiple lawsuits have been brought against Sino-Metals for its failure to adequately respond to the disaster, including requests for tens of billions of dollars to restore the environment, compensate and relocate

victims, and provide for long-term needs resulting from the disaster.¹⁶⁰ For example, one case, brought by three CSOs and 54 victims, alleges that Sino-Metals and NFC Africa Mining Plc, the company who owns the land upon which Sino-Metals operates, have violated the Water Resources Management Act, the Mines and Minerals Development Act, and the Environmental Management Act, and infringed on the plaintiffs' right to a clean, safe, and healthy environment.¹⁶¹ Among other things, the plaintiffs in this suit are asking for interim payments of \$220 million USD for independent assessments, immediate resettlement, and other remedies for the victims, as well as for Sino-Metals to facilitate medical screening and continuous biomonitoring of all residents in affected communities.¹⁶² These plaintiffs are also reportedly requesting a \$9.7 billion USD environmental restoration fund from Sino-Metals.¹⁶³

Given Sino-Metals' early success at suppressing assessments of the damage and manipulating victims, it is no wonder that those most affected by the disaster doubt both the company's sincerity to follow through with appropriate compensation and relocation, and the government's ability to hold the company accountable, without action by the High Court of Zambia.

A Corrupt Government Supported Sino-Metals' Negligence and Irresponsibility

The consequences of the Sino-Metals tailings dam collapse in Zambia will likely continue for years. While the disaster was singular in its impact, it occurred within a broader context of irresponsible mining activities by Chinese companies in Zambia and a government that may be too weak and compromised by its reliance on the Chinese state to rein them in. Moreover, the Sino-Metals catastrophe has set a dangerous precedent of a lack of accountability for polluters. On April 3, 2026 yet another tailings dam in Kitwe, Copperbelt province collapsed, releasing over 3.5 tons of heavy metals into the Chibuluma Stream, a key water source for affected communities and a key source which feeds into the Kafue River.¹⁶⁴ The spill resulted in the death of aquatic life and caused significant environmental damage, according to online sources.¹⁶⁵

First, the Government of Zambia owes Chinese creditors more than \$6 billion USD, including more than \$4 billion USD to the Chinese government, according to researchers.¹⁶⁶ China has also reportedly promised Zambia a much needed \$5 billion USD in copper investment by

2031.¹⁶⁷ It is therefore reasonable to assume that these Chinese loans and investments provide a measure of control and influence in Zambia that could embolden Chinese companies to behave irresponsibly and motivate politicians and regulators to prioritize economics over environmental and human rights concerns, including through the payment of bribes.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, China has made significant investments in Zambia’s media ecosystem, including Chinese digital television provider TopStar purchasing a 60% stake in the Zambia National Broadcast Channel in 2017, allowing it to influence reporting on China’s operations in the region.¹⁶⁹

Just weeks after the Sino-Metals disaster, Zambian regulators reportedly paid a surprise visit to another Chinese-owned mine near Sino-Metals—Rongxing Mineral Processing Plant—and found acid from the same kind of tailings dam that collapsed at Sino-Metals.¹⁷⁰ One of the ministers of Water Development and Sanitation said that Rongxing had been “polluting our river system with impunity,” and subsequently shut down the company.¹⁷¹ However, contacts reported that Rongxing remained closed for a short and insufficient period of time to address operational violations.¹⁷²

The challenge is not one of insufficient laws and regulations. Applied Science’s report analyzes the policy, legal, and regulatory tools that govern Zambia’s mining sector, ultimately concluding that Zambia generally has adequate laws on paper—with some noteworthy gaps, including related to tailings dam management and compensation and relocation of victims of pollution — but is stymied by weak implementation and enforcement of those laws, and limited government capacity.¹⁷³ Select Committee staff were also told that the Zambian government is hampered by pervasive corruption and a culture of aversion to accountability.¹⁷⁴

Despite its considerable influence over the Zambian government, China controls a much smaller percentage of critical minerals production than other nearby countries, though it is growing. One alarming sign that China’s plan is working: On January 28, 2026, Mines and Minerals Development Minister Paul Kabuswe announced that Zambia’s failure to reach its one-million-ton copper production target for 2025 was due, in part, to the shutdown of Sino-Metals leach plant following the spill.¹⁷⁵ By February 27, 2026, Zambian Vice President Nalumango had announced

that Sino-Metals could resume operations at its Chambishi Mine.¹⁷⁶ As of April 2026, Sino-Metals has not only reopened the mine and resumed operations, but is currently expanding its operations in Zambia, with investments of \$200 million USD to develop the Samba copper mine near Chingola, Zambia.¹⁷⁷ Sino-Metals has already begun construction on their new site, which is in a Game Management Area.¹⁷⁸ Samba's location is such that if the tailing dam spills at this new mine, the spill would then empty directly into the Kafue National Park. Nevertheless, the Government of Zambia has approved the Samba mine and construction is under way.¹⁷⁹ Samba is projected to yield about 1.5 million tons of copper ore and 20,000 tons of copper concentrate annually after it becomes operational in 2027.¹⁸⁰ In September 2025, the Governance and Development Advocates Zambia, a Zambia CSO, praised Sino-Metals planned Samba investment and called the company the "lifeline" of the Kalulushi District, even as the toxic evidence of Sino-Metals' negligence coursed through the waterways of the region.¹⁸¹

KoBold Metals Offers a Meaningful Contrast to Sino-Metals

While in Zambia, Select Committee staff visited the Mingomba copper-cobalt exploration site of KoBold Metals Africa, an arm of U.S. mineral exploration and development company, KoBold Metals (KoBold).¹⁸² Mingomba Mining Limited (MML) is the legal entity that holds the Mingomba copper-cobalt project in Zambia's Copperbelt. It is a joint venture, with KoBold as the majority owner and operator and ZCCM-IH (Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines Investment Holdings, the Zambian government's mining investment vehicle) as a minority partner.¹⁸³ The approach by KoBold, as the leader of MML, to community engagement and investment in Zambia offered a meaningful contrast to Sino-Metals. KoBold's leaders outlined the company's extensive efforts to earn a Social License to Operate from the communities around its site. Social License to Operate is an informal construct based on the premise that mining companies need more than just government permits and regulatory approvals to operate—they also need to gain the approval and trust of the communities through engagement and investment.¹⁸⁴

At the time of the Select Committee's visit, KoBold Metals Africa, led by Zambian-born CEO Mfikeyi Makayi,¹⁸⁵ employed about 400 staff at its Mingomba site, 90% of which were local Zambians, with Zambians filling over 70% of the project.¹⁸⁶ KoBold's goods and services at its Mingomba

site were sourced by Zambian businesses, including maintenance, construction, hospitality, and catering, providing significant value to the local community and promised growth in the business community with the growth of the mine.¹⁸⁷ This was a marked difference from concerns that staff heard from CSOs and business groups about Chinese mining companies sub-contracting to Chinese companies instead of local businesses and importing Chinese workers, particularly for technical and leadership jobs.¹⁸⁸

KoBold conducts consistent and regular engagement with the six communities around its Mingomba site, through Community Liaison Committees populated by elected community members and quarterly townhalls, according to company leaders and documentation.¹⁸⁹ The primary objective of the CLCs is to strengthen communication and accountability between MML/KoBold and its host communities, including representing community voices in development planning, disseminating accurate information about projects and timelines, supporting grievance resolution at the local level, mobilizing communities for consultations and project activities, and monitoring social investment projects to ensure transparency and accountability.

KoBold Metals is also making significant investments in the local community, informed by economic surveys and community input, aligned with federal and local government priorities, and designed for capacity-building and sustainability rather than one-time donations.¹⁹⁰ Investments include:

- Construction of a brand-new secondary school in Mingomba, Kawama Secondary School, with solar power and plans to add a science lab, which significantly expanded the number of students the local school can serve.
- Construction of a maternity clinic at the local hospital, including installation of critical equipment, which is projected to increase the number of maternity beds from two to 24.
- Agricultural cultivation efforts for 200 smallholder farmers in the community, including establishing agricultural co-ops, irrigation schemes and new boreholes, livestock grants and support, capacity-building training, and market and climate assessments to guide planting;

- Partnering with Stanford University, the Copperbelt University and the University of Zambia to offer Master of Science scholarships in Data Science and Exploration Geology to Zambian students, with the intent to advance cutting-edge geosciences and exploration innovation in Zambia.¹⁹¹



The images above are of Kawama Secondary School, built by KoBold (left) and scenes from KoBold's April 29, 2026 groundbreaking at Mingomba, with Zambian President Hichelema, KoBold Africa CEO Mfikeyi Makayi, and KoBold CEO Kurt House (right) (KoBold Metals).

As it develops the site, the company has committed to following all environmental regulations, resettlement, land access and disturbance procedures to exacting standards. Officials said that they follow International Finance Corporation (IFC) performance standards and have engaged an international consultant to develop advance policies and procedures for ethical resettlement and compensation processes. Furthermore, unlike big Western mines like Mingomba that give the Zambian Government 20 percent free carry ownership, Sino-Metals Leach has no such requirement.¹⁹²

Finally, KoBold has publicly declared an anti-corruption stance: “We will never pay a bribe. We walk away from deals, discoveries, even countries rather than participate in corruption. We are setting a new standard: the world’s best investors and the world’s best innovators don’t

tolerate corruption.”¹⁹³ This posture makes KoBold a bold outlier in Zambia, which in 2025, scored a 37 out of 100 on Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI), 99th in the world, signaling high levels of perceived corruption.¹⁹⁴

Kobold’s investment in and transparent engagement with the community and clear anti-corruption stance stood in stark contrast to the examples of Sino-Metals and other Chinese mining activities Select Committee staff had learned of elsewhere in the country, demonstrating a better model for how responsible minerals companies should operate in their communities.

At the April 29, 2026 groundbreaking ceremony at the Mingomba site, KoBold CEO Kurt House stated, “By the end of this year, KoBold will have invested \$600 million [USD] in Zambia...Mingomba is a landmark American-Zambian partnership—one built on shared values and technological excellence...Zambia is one of Africa’s most successful multi-party democracies with 6 peaceful transfers of power, 3 of them between rival political parties. That commitment to the peaceful transfer of power, and to a government of the people, creates a foundational connection between Zambia and America. Indeed, the strength of Zambia’s democracy was an important reason we chose to invest here...By the end of the decade, KoBold will have invested more than \$3 billion [USD] developing this mine, as well as in other projects around this great nation.”¹⁹⁵

U.S. Ambassador to Zambia Michael Gonzalez echoed this sense of optimism and drew contrasts between KoBold’s “extraordinary commitment” to Zambia and certain “models of foreign investment” that often leave communities worse than they found them: “The contrast speaks for itself, and Zambians know it well. America brings integrity.”¹⁹⁶

PART II: BELT-AND-ROAD LITHIUM EXPLOITATION IN ZIMBABWE

This section of the report provides the illustrative example of Zimbabwe—a cautionary tale of what can happen when Chinese companies take over a country’s entire mining sector. Select Committee staff traveled to Zimbabwe to meet with the mining operators, CSOs, and mining communities to understand the impacts of Chinese mining operations on the country and the people. Instead of meeting with Select Committee staff as requested to discuss China’s influence in the critical minerals sector, the Zimbabwean government tasked members of its intelligence service to tail the staff delegation during the visit. Absent the government’s perspective, what we heard—and corroborated through dozens of public reports—is a consistent story of “unchecked extractivism” by Chinese companies at the expense of the environment and local communities and enabled by corruption and incapacity at all levels of government. Chinese mining companies’ reported abuses include smuggling, violence against workers to control them or quell complaints about working conditions, pollution and resource depletion, and forced evictions and grave exhumations. Despite the robust advocacy efforts of Zimbabwe’s CSOs, real change in Zimbabwe’s mining sector will require the Zimbabwean government to stand up to the exploitative behaviors of its “all-weather friend” China.

China Controls Zimbabwe’s Mining Sector

China dominates Zimbabwe’s highly diverse mining sector, with Chinese companies currently controlling an estimated 90% of the country’s mining operations.¹⁹⁷ The mining sector is a critical industry for Zimbabwe, accounting for about 14.5 percent of its gross domestic product and 75 percent of its national exports.¹⁹⁸ Zimbabwe has close to 40 different minerals, including the largest lithium deposits in Africa and sixth largest in the world.¹⁹⁹ In 2025, Zimbabwe exported 1.128 million metric tons of lithium spodumene concentrate, 11% more than in 2024.²⁰⁰

As global demand for lithium has skyrocketed, Chinese companies have steadily invested in Zimbabwe’s lithium sector, through both direct acquisitions of existing companies and joint ventures with local firms.²⁰¹ According to the Zimbabwe Investment Development Agency, Chinese multi-national companies invested over \$1.5 billion USD from 2010 to

2023 in the country’s lithium sector.²⁰² As of September 2025, Chinese companies reportedly had significant investments or involvement in at least seven major lithium projects in Zimbabwe, as seen below.²⁰³

Lithium Project	Primary Owner	Chinese Stake
Arcadia Lithium Project	Prospect Lithium Zimbabwe (PLZ)	100% owned by Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt, majority stake acquired in 2022 for \$422 million.
Bikita Minerals	Bikita Minerals Ltd	100% owned by Sinomine Resource Group, majority stake acquired in 2022 for \$180 million.
Sabi Star	Max Mind Investments Zimbabwe Ltd	At least 51% owned by state-owned Chengxin Lithium Group via subsidiary, acquired in 2021. ²⁰⁴
Kamativi	Kamativi Mining Company Joint Venture	Operated and controlled by Yahua Group via subsidiary Sichuan PD Technology Group through JV with Defold Mine, which is owned by Zimbabwe’s Mutapa Investment Fund. ²⁰⁵
Zulu Lithium Project	Premier African Minerals	13.38% Canmax Technologies equity stake and an agreement that Canmax receives between 25 and 50% of gross proceeds of lithium shipments. ²⁰⁶
Sandawana Mine	Kuvimba Mining House (Zimbabwe state-owned)	No Chinese equity stake. Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt and Tsingshan Holding Group are financing and building a lithium processing plant at the mine, which they will operate for at least five years before transferring it to Kuvimba. ²⁰⁷
Gwanda Lithium Project	Dinson Mining Investments	Majority owned by Dinson Mining Investments, a subsidiary of Tsingshan Holding Group.

Sources: Transparency International Australia²⁰⁸ and analyses of other public reporting, as cited above.

Chinese Companies Exploiting Weak and Corrupt Government

Chinese investment in the lithium sector has occurred within a broader pattern of Chinese investment and influence in Zimbabwe over the past 25 years. In 2003, Zimbabwe’s relations with the West had broken down due to human rights abuses, controversial land reforms, and electoral fraud. In need of new lines of credit and investment to counteract western sanctions, then-President Robert Mugabe turned to China, in what is informally called the “Look East Policy.” In 2018, Zimbabwe and China signed a memorandum of understanding for Zimbabwe to join China’s Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI).²⁰⁹ These policies, among others, opened the door for massive Chinese investments in infrastructure projects and the mining and energy sectors. The two governments have become increasingly cozy over the years, culminating in a September 2025 joint announcement that they had upgraded their bilateral relationship to an “all-weather community with a shared future,”²¹⁰ or “all-weather friends.”

Beyond the bumper sticker slogan, China’s impact on Zimbabwe has been decidedly less friendly, with widespread reports of China meddling in Zimbabwe’s internal politics and enabling and taking advantage of corruption at all levels of the Zimbabwe government to serve its own aims. In 2025, Zimbabwe scored a 22 out 100 on Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI), 157th in the world, signaling high levels of perceived corruption.²¹¹

In the mining sector alone, critics say that the close relationship between the two governments has “allowed some Chinese companies to operate above the law, aided by corrupt local officials who prioritize personal gain over the public interest.”²¹² In September 2025, Transparency International found that the lithium sector has “close links to politically exposed persons (PEPs)” such as cabinet ministers, religious leaders and traditional leaders, who “played a critical role in negotiating contracts and facilitating the award of prospecting licenses.”²¹³ It also found significant equity ownership amongst PEPs and those with close links to members of the executive in the ownership structures of some lithium companies.²¹⁴

Chinese companies are also able to take advantage of Zimbabwe’s weak and opaque governance structures within the mining industry to gain influence and avoid accountability. Transparency International identified a litany of weaknesses in Zimbabwe’s mining sector governance, including: lack of clear timelines in the award processes for lithium mining rights, which provides opportunities for bribery by public sector employees; political interference in the awarding of lithium mining licenses; rent-seeking behavior among lithium governance officials, including awarding mining grants without open competition or accepting informal payments as a pre-requisite for fast-tracking approvals; opaque environmental monitoring practices and undisclosed environmental assessments; and, limited community and stakeholder consultation practices.²¹⁵

Chinese Companies Engaging in “Unchecked Extractivism” in Zimbabwe

Select Committee staff traveled to Zimbabwe to meet with the business community, mining operators, CSOs and members of mining communities to understand the impacts of Chinese mining operations on the country and the people. What staff heard—and corroborated through

dozens of public reports—is a consistent story of “unchecked extractivism” by Chinese companies at the expense of the environment, local communities, and the Zimbabwean people, and enabled by corruption and incapacity at all levels of government. The discussion below provides only a brief snapshot of Chinese mining companies abuses in Zimbabwe, with primary focus on the recently emergent lithium sector.

Illegal export of raw lithium and other minerals

Chinese miners and their business associates are driving illicit trade and smuggling of raw lithium and rare earth minerals in Zimbabwe. In 2022, to capture more value from its lithium resources and put a stop to rampant underreporting of lithium ore exports, Zimbabwe established a ban on exports of raw lithium ore.²¹⁶ This was insufficient to stem the tide of lithium ore being smuggled by the truck load over Zimbabwe’s porous borders, facilitated by corrupt practices among border officials and the use of counterfeit permits.²¹⁷

According to community representatives, Chinese miners are at the center of this illicit trade.²¹⁸ Given that Chinese companies control the lithium mining sector in Zimbabwe, there can be no widescale smuggling without their complicity. In one major incident in 2023, about 4,000 tons of lithium ore, believed to be destined for illegal export via South Africa and Mozambique, were intercepted in the Masvingo province. The authorities arrested 17 suspects and seized five trucks loaded with lithium ore believed to be from Bikita Minerals.²¹⁹ Community watchers, who count the loaded trucks leaving Arcadia Mine, alleged that Prospect Lithium Resources is also significantly underreporting the amount of lithium it is exporting.²²⁰ An employee at Prospect Lithium reported to *Global Press Journal* that Prospect Lithium undervalues high grades of lithium and conceals high-quality lithium beneath lower-value ore to mislead Ministry of Mines inspectors.²²¹

In 2025, Zimbabwe announced that the export of lithium concentrates would also be banned beginning in January 2027.²²² In February 2026, however, Zimbabwe shocked world lithium markets by immediately halting exports of lithium concentrate—a year ahead of time—due to underreporting by miners and government malpractices that had spun out of control.²²³

Zimbabwe had previously granted temporary exemptions to its export bans to allow for companies like Prospect Lithium Zimbabwe and Bikita Minerals to build processing plants in Zimbabwe, but government officials said that this grace period was being exploited.²²⁴ In January 2026, Zimbabwean authorities reportedly discovered massive Zimbabwean mineral ores sitting at a port in Mozambique.²²⁵ It is not just lithium ore that is being stolen from Zimbabwe. The Ministry of Mines and Development said that the raw and undeclared lithium ore is also “teeming” with tantalum, tin, and rare earth elements—worth potentially billions of dollars in lost value for the people of Zimbabwe.²²⁶

Labor rights abuses and disregard for worker safety

Chinese lithium mines in Zimbabwe are responsible for rampant labor rights abuses and worker safety violations, according to CSOs and community members, including low pay, long work shifts, two-tiered labor hierarchy that favors imported Chinese workers, inadequate personal protective equipment, disregard for safety protocols, poor housing conditions, and worker abuse.²²⁷

An investigation by *New Zimbabwe* into conditions at Arcadia Mine, owned by Chinese battery giant Huayou Cobalt, provides an illustrative example of housing conditions. It found workers living in squalid conditions, in wooden cabins with no ventilation or floors, with open sewage as a common feature.²²⁸ Makeshift bathroom facilities at the site were also reportedly blocked and a new bathroom facility was built with two rows of toilets facing one another, without privacy or barriers, as seen below.²²⁹



The images above show the workers’ bathroom, open sewage, and a worker bathing in a makeshift facility at Arcadia Mine (Mary Taruvinga/NewZimbabwe).²³⁰

Community members also told staff about how Chinese managers in mines use physical abuse and violence in mines to control workers or quell complaints about working conditions.²³¹ In one example of this, in 2024, Chinese managers from Makanka Mine tied two Zimbabwean workers to a front-end loader bucket and raised them into the air, reportedly as punishment for the workers allegedly stealing diesel, as seen below in a series of still shots captured from a viral video of the incident.²³² The Chinese bosses responsible were deported, which outraged locals who believed they should have faced prosecution in Zimbabwe.²³³



The images above are a progression of still-shots from a video, showing the local mine workers being strung up into the air.²³⁴

In 2020, a Chinese mining boss, who was delinquent in paying his staff, shot two Zimbabwean mine workers after they complained about the outstanding pay.²³⁵

Safety incidents at Chinese mines in Zimbabwe are also common due to what CSOs allege is systemic disregard for worker safety.²³⁶ For example, at Arcadia Mine, in 2023, two workers were killed in separate accidents within a short period of time due to unsafe working conditions at the mine.²³⁷ One was crushed while he slept in a make-shift wood cabin by a runaway dump truck.²³⁸ The other was killed when the tire he was working on in a poorly equipped workshop exploded.²³⁹ At Bikita Minerals, a worker was killed in October 2023 when a 30-ton crusher collapsed on him.²⁴⁰ Another worker lost his leg in a workplace accident in 2024.²⁴¹ In August 2025, three local children were injured by debris from a spodumene extraction blast, and a dump truck driver was killed by another truck due to extreme dust-obscured vision.²⁴²

Environmental degradation and depletion of resources

Chinese lithium mines reportedly abuse and pollute local environments and deplete community resources throughout Zimbabwe. According to a Zimbabwean CSO, large-scale lithium mining by Chinese companies has “imposed high costs” on Zimbabwe’s rural communities, often without meaningful consultation, adequate compensation, or effective regulatory protection.²⁴³ These reported environmental abuses include water contamination, water depletion, and dangerous levels of silica dust pollution from trucks and processing of hard-rock lithium.

Bikita Minerals, Zimbabwe’s largest lithium mine and a subsidiary of Chinese state-linked Sinomine Resource Group, is alleged to be a particularly bad environmental actor. In November 2023, Bikita discharged toxic waste into the Matezva Dam, which is a critical water source for people, crops, and livestock in the Gutu and Bikita Districts.²⁴⁴ Zimbabwe’s Environmental Management Agency (EMA) fined the company \$5,000 USD—the highest penalty for such offenders and hardly a deterrent for a large mining company with deep pockets.²⁴⁵ Locals reliant on the dam reported that their crops had rotted and the fish in the dam disappeared after the leak,²⁴⁶ and they have since been without clean water for two years due to ongoing pollution, according to a local CSO.²⁴⁷

Bikita Minerals also built a toxic “slime” dam over a 40-meter well that had served over 300 villagers for 70 years, without any community consultation or regulatory notification.²⁴⁸ This flagrant usurping of the local water source has forced villagers to travel four kilometers for water.²⁴⁹ Locals who rely on the Matezva dam for a gravity-driven irrigation scheme allege that Bikita Minerals is drawing water from the dam at an unsustainable rate, which is harming their ability to water crops, and creating challenges for their livestock.²⁵⁰



The image on the left shows an empty water tank connected to the Matezva dam, with water levels too low to flow into the irrigation scheme (Tatenda Chitagu/Mail&Guardian).²⁵¹ The image on the right is an example of the dust pollution near Sabi Star mine (EnviroPress).²⁵²

Chinese mines in multiple communities, including Arcadia, Sabi Star, and Gwanda, reportedly also drilled boreholes deeper than the local wells, causing the villagers' wells to run dry, as their water drained down into the new wells of the mines, according to community representatives.²⁵³ Cattle farmers near Gwanda Mine reported that the mine drilled 10 deep, new boreholes, which drained all of the farmers' water sources, and as a result, is killing their livestock.²⁵⁴

Chinese mines are polluting local communities with heavy levels of dust, due to hundreds of trucks driving up and down unpaved roads, hauling lithium. More than just a nuisance, this pollution is driving increased rates of pneumonia and tuberculosis in communities around the mines, including near Gwanda and Sabi Star mines, according to public reporting.²⁵⁵ In December 2025, villagers in Buhera petitioned parliament for urgent action to protect their health from Sabi Star Lithium Mine, stating that "Homes, shops and food are coated in dust and children and the elderly struggle to breathe. At peak operations, about 100 trucks pass along the road every day. Our homes are covered in dust. Children and the elderly wake up coughing and with headaches. Most schools are located along the road and children are not spared from dust even at school."²⁵⁶

Forcible evictions and grave exhumations

Chinese mines have reportedly forcibly evicted villagers and exhumed graves in local communities without proper consultation and compensation, to make way for mine expansions. The Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association reported that more than 1,000 people in the Goromonzi and Bikita districts were displaced or negatively affected by lithium mine expansion and prospecting in the Goromonzi and Bikita districts between 2022 and 2024.²⁵⁷

In one instance, Chinese company MaxMind Investments, a subsidiary of state-owned Chengxin Lithium Group, displaced 41 families to make way for the Sabi Star mine expansion.²⁵⁸ The mining company, alleged to be allied with government officials, manipulated and coerced the families into accepting forced resettlements by promising new houses and jobs on the mines.²⁵⁹ Families were moved off of their ancestral lands, to homes of lesser size and quality, lost access to critical natural resources, and were given less compensation than they'd asked for, according to a researcher at the University of Queensland.²⁶⁰ Sabi Star

also reportedly exhumed 30 graves as part of this displacement without appropriate consultation or respect for culture ceremonies, traumatizing the families of the dead.²⁶¹

Bikita Minerals, owned by Sinomine Resources, displaced at least 12 families by digging a two-meter-deep trench around their homes, cutting them off from water sources and their agriculture land, and forcing abandonment of their homes.²⁶²



Massive trench, created by Bikita Minerals as a barrier, dividing individuals' land and blocking their access to water (Centre for Natural Resource Governance).²⁶³

Community representatives also attribute increased rates of sexual assault in communities around the mines to Chinese workers.²⁶⁴

Bribery of local officials and lack of accountability

The Chinese mines lack effective grievance processes through which community members can bring their concerns to be addressed, according to community representatives.²⁶⁵ Instead, community representatives told Select Committee staff that the Chinese mining companies bribe local district officials and law enforcement, who spare the Chinese mines from accountability.²⁶⁶

The behavior at the mines and lack of accountability has inflamed tensions between communities and Chinese mines around the country, leading to protests and violence. For example, in Hwange district, villagers discovered that Chinese-owned Zhongjing Helli Energy Private Limited was running pipes from the Kalope dam, a critical source of

water for the local community, to draw water from the dam to support mining operations, without proper consultation or permission from the community.²⁶⁷ This has led to protests by villagers and ultimately arrests, when the villagers attempted to stop the Chinese company from stealing the community's water because they lack effective recourse.²⁶⁸

According to one local CSO, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce said that it was establishing a grievance process to receive complaints about Chinese companies but, as of January 2026, had not fully implemented this process.²⁶⁹

Chinese Companies' Abuses Enabled by Lack of Competition

According to a CSO white paper, blatant Chinese mining abuses would normally create reputational and supply chain risks for the companies, but because they have near-total control over the lithium value chain in Zimbabwe, the risk is muted.²⁷⁰ Real competition would force the Chinese companies to behave more responsibly. However, while Western mining companies are cautious about investing in Zimbabwe given the corruption, legacy of sanctions, and economic and political instability, Zimbabwe provides the perfect target for Chinese companies that have both an appetite for risk and a blueprint for exploitation. As a result, Zimbabwe is now a captive supplier of lithium to China, and the losers are the Zimbabwean people, who have received little benefit from China's lithium investments.

Select Committee staff requested to meet with the Government of Zimbabwe to discuss China's influence in the critical minerals sector, but officials declined. The Government did, however, task members of its intelligence service to tail Select Committee staff during the visit, presumably to learn who staff were meeting with while in Zimbabwe.

There are some signs of hope in Zimbabwe. During the staff visit in January 2026, the Select Committee learned about the CSO community's extensive work with the Ministry of Mines to develop updated legislation to address gaps and weaknesses in Zimbabwe's current mining governance structures, as well as robust advocacy and monitoring efforts by CSOs. Also, in February 2026, Zimbabwe's Ministry of Mines and Development announced that it will be fully implementing an electronic mining cadastre system.²⁷¹ A mining cadastre is an online portal or map that includes information about a country's active mining operations and


the status of mining rights and permits. The lack of a modern, reliable, and transparent cadastre system has been one of many deterrents for U.S. and other international mining companies considering Zimbabwe's mining sector, according to U.S. Ambassador Pamela Tremont.²⁷² The impact of these efforts remains to be seen. Ultimately, for real change in the lithium mining sector, the Zimbabwean government will have to stand up to the exploitative behaviors of its "all-weather friend" China, and fight for its own people.

PART III: SPOTLIGHTS ON GLOBAL CHINA MINERALS MAFIA ABUSES

The following section provides brief overviews of a dozen cases of reported malpractices by Chinese state-owned and private mining companies around the world.

Exploitation in Serbia

Bor Copper and Gold Mine

<i>Location</i>	44.09500, 22.09417	 <p style="font-size: small;">Serbia Bor Copper and Gold Mine²⁷³</p>
<i>Country</i>	Serbia	
<i>Owner</i>	Zijin Mining Group	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Labor, Environmental	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Copper	

Overview

Zijin Mining Group has reportedly severely exploited workers at its copper mining complex in Bor, Serbia, forcing them to live in crowded and squalid conditions, and stripping them of their autonomy.²⁷⁴ The Chinese government enabled this abuse through a deal where the Serbs agreed to forgo inspections or enforcement of labor laws in Chinese-owned companies.²⁷⁵

Mining Operations

Zijin Mining Group Co., Ltd (Zijin) is one of China’s largest state-owned mining companies, with subsidiaries and vast copper, gold, and zinc assets around the world.²⁷⁶

Zijin acquired a 63% interest in Serbia’s state-owned copper producer RTB Bor in 2018 as part of its Belt and Road Initiative, which was subsequently renamed Serbia Zijin Copper in June 2020.²⁷⁷ Serbia Zijin Copper includes the Bor copper mine and the Čukaru Peki copper-gold mine, which had combined output in 2024 of 292,900 tonnes of copper and 8 tonnes of gold.²⁷⁸ After further expansions at both mines, Zijin projects a future copper output of 450,000 tonnes per annum, which is expected to position Zijin as the largest copper producer in Europe.²⁷⁹

Abusive Actions

Zijin imports migrant labor from China and other countries to work in the Bor copper mine, enabling it to avoid scrutiny from the Serbian government.²⁸⁰ As part of its bilateral trade deal with China, Serbia agreed not to enforce its labor laws for Chinese migrant workers in Chinese-owned companies and worksites, even with credible allegations of forced labor and exploitation.²⁸¹

Zijin has used this freedom to abuse and control its workers, subjecting them to brutal working and living conditions, low and delayed wages, and lack of proper equipment, as documented through investigations by China Labor Watch²⁸² and the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN).²⁸³ For example, Chinese workers at Zijin Copper Mine reported being forced to work more than 72 hours a week, without being paid overtime, and up to 26 days a month.²⁸⁴ Workers who refuse reported being retaliated against, such as through delayed wages or forced moves to worse housing.²⁸⁵ Workers were forced to sign blank contracts, leaving them without clear terms of employment.²⁸⁶ Zijin also restricts its workers' movements, preventing them from leaving the mine,²⁸⁷ and slaps them with heavy fines for violating arbitrary rules.²⁸⁸ "We don't have any freedom, like we're prisoners," said one worker.²⁸⁹

According to China Labor Watch, Zijin workers' living conditions are "unbearable," filled with trash and excrement, and a stench from the latrines so pervasive that even the crowded dorm rooms smell like sewage.²⁹⁰

Many workers are trapped in this abusive situation. Zijin routinely confiscates the passports of its migrant workers, which China Labor Watch calls an "insidious and effective method of controlling workers" that traps them in these abusive jobs.²⁹¹ Some workers also reportedly paid large sums of money to agents to secure employment at the mine—up to 1.5 year's salary—effectively placing them in debt bondage so they cannot afford to leave or speak out about conditions.²⁹²



Squalid conditions inside workers' housing (left),²⁹³ a farmer whose land was expropriated by Zijin (center),²⁹⁴ and Borska Reka, the "dead river" (right).²⁹⁵


Investigative reports have detailed the heavy toll that Serbia Zijin Copper has also levied on local communities, destroying the environment, endangering food sources, and displacing villagers.²⁹⁶ In August 2025, the United Nations Special Rapporteur found that Zijin has polluted the air, water, and soil, including with dangerous levels of arsenic and lead, leading to increased risks of cancers for the local population and decreasing life expectancy by two years.²⁹⁷ In the words of one villager, “It’s become like we’re sleeping on gold but dying of cancer.”²⁹⁸ Local farming communities have lost access to fertile land and clean water,²⁹⁹ and the nearby Borska Reka River is now considered a “dead river,” devoid of aquatic life due to pollution.³⁰⁰ Zijin Mining has also reportedly displaced villagers without adequate compensation, restricted their access to natural resources,³⁰¹ and caused homes to collapse due to underground mining operations.³⁰²

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

Serbia Zijin Copper is a subsidiary of Zijin Mining Group Co. Ltd, which has a global track record of human rights abuses. Zijin Mining Group and its subsidiaries in Xinjiang were added to the U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act List in January 2025 due to their participation in the state-imposed forced labor and human rights abuses of the Uyghur people.³⁰³

Predatory Business in Argentina

Cauchari-Olaroz Project

<i>Location</i>	-23.67021, -66.743304	 <p>Cauchari-Olaroz Project.³⁰⁴</p>
<i>Country</i>	Argentina	
<i>Owner</i>	Ganfeng Lithium	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Coercion	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Lithium	

Overview

Ganfeng Lithium Co. Ltd (Ganfeng) reportedly employed predatory business practices to defraud Lithium Americas Corporation (LAC), a Canadian company, out of its controlling interests in the Minera Exar lithium project in Argentina.

Mining Operations

Ganfeng Lithium Co., Ltd is one of the largest lithium producers and processors in the world and is a strategic partner of the CCP, aiding in China's quest for global critical mineral dominance.³⁰⁵

The Minera Exar S.A. operates the Cauchari-Olaroz salar lithium brine project in Argentina.³⁰⁶ The project is expected to produce 40,000 tons of lithium per year at full production.³⁰⁷ LAC was the original parent company of the Minera Exar joint venture (JV), initiating the project at Cauchari-Olaroz in 2009.³⁰⁸ Between 2017 and 2019, Ganfeng bought into and gradually increased its ownership stake in LAC's Minera Exar JV through a series of deals, which reportedly included promised \$205 million USD in loans (\$133 million USD from Ganfeng) and a line of credit at 8% to fund LAC's capital contributions to develop the project.³⁰⁹

Abusive Actions

In late 2019, Ganfeng, then a 50% shareholder,³¹⁰ informed LAC it could not provide agreed-upon funds to LAC to meet its capital contribution responsibilities due to China's State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) regulations restricting the total hard currency limit for offshore investments of \$300M, according to LAC CEO Jonathan Evans.³¹¹ Then, LAC was told that SAFE would allow the company to invest outside of China in a single project for which it *did* have a controlling interest.³¹² Mr. Evans said he was unaware of the reported

SAFE currency limits, and they were never acknowledged as part of the JV with Ganfeng.³¹³ Ganfeng also reportedly refused to try to find a solution with the Chinese government to uphold its agreement with LAC.³¹⁴

Without other funding options, Mr. Evans went to Shanghai to negotiate with Ganfeng.³¹⁵ LAC documents show that Ganfeng offered to buy an additional 1% interest in Minera Exar for \$16 million in cash and a \$40 million loan, instead of honoring the original deal with LAC.³¹⁶ This increased Ganfeng's share to a controlling interest of 51% for the project. The deal was finalized in August 2020.³¹⁷ Mr. Evans told the Select Committee this was a "forced sale of control" — a result of the predatory actions of Ganfeng in halting its promised capital contributions to the project.³¹⁸



Cauchari-Olaroz Lithium Brine Project (Lithium Argentina)³¹⁹.

In January 2022, LAC acquired 100% of Millennial, a Canadian company with assets in the Salta Province in Argentina.³²⁰ This acquisition came under review by the Canadian government due to concerns that Ganfeng, then an 11% stakeholder of LAC,³²¹ would be able to influence the Millennial assets and Thacker Pass in Nevada, to benefit China, according to LAC documentation.³²²

After committing to Canada to dilute Ganfeng's interests in LAC and its assets, LAC split into two companies organized around the Argentine and U.S. assets.³²³ The original company retained the Argentine assets and was renamed Lithium Argentina.³²⁴ The new spin-off company, Lithium Americas, retained Thacker Pass in Nevada.³²⁵ After the split, LAC informed the Canadian government that Lithium Argentina took actions that seemed contrary to the commitments that LAC agreed to

with Canadian regulators, according to Mr. Evans,³²⁶ including selling a 14.9% interest in Pastos Grandes to Ganfeng in August 2024.³²⁷ Notably, new Lithium Argentina CEO, Sam Piggott, is a former Ganfeng employee.³²⁸ In November 2024, Lithium Argentina announced it would redomicile from Canada to Switzerland as part of a deal with Ganfeng,³²⁹ ostensibly to skirt compliance with its commitments to Canada, avoid restrictions on deals with Chinese firms, and allow for greater control by Ganfeng.


In August 2025, Lithium Argentina and Ganfeng agreed to merge their assets in the Salta province to create a single large-scale lithium operation—with Ganfeng holding a 67% share and Lithium Argentina holding a 33% share, validating Canada’s concerns about Ganfeng’s intent.³³⁰

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

As another example of alleged unscrupulous business practices, Ganfeng Lithium is facing potential criminal charges of insider trading for a 2019-2020 stock transaction involving Jiangxi Special Electric Motor Co.³³¹ In 2024, Ganfeng was fined 3.32 million yuan by China Securities Regulatory Commission, and in December 2025, Ganfeng announced that the case had been referred to Chinese prosecutors for review and possible indictment.³³²

Child Labor in DRC Cobalt Mines

Artisinal Mines in Katanga Copperbelt

<i>Location</i>	Various	 <p>Young worker digging in a tunnel.³³³</p>
<i>Country</i>	DRC	
<i>Owner</i>	Huayou Cobalt	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Labor, Displacement, Environmental	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Cobalt	

Overview

Huayou Cobalt, a major Chinese battery-materials supplier, reportedly purchases cobalt sourced from artisanal mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where child labor is widespread. Thousands of Congolese children work in hazardous mining conditions instead of going to school, excavating tunnels and hauling ore that feeds global supply chains for electric vehicles and consumer electronics. Fatal tunnel collapses, toxic exposure, and injuries are common, making cobalt mining one of the most dangerous forms of child labor in the world.

Mining Operations

Huayou Cobalt is a dominant Chinese processor that controls a vast extraction network in the DRC through its subsidiary, Congo Dongfang Mining (CDM). In addition to operating industrial mines, CDM reportedly functions as a buyer, sourcing ore through a labyrinth of traders, depots, and artisinal mining complexes across the Katanga Copperbelt.³³⁴ CDM has also forced the conversion of residential areas into artisanal complexes from which it sources its cobalt, such as Kasulo neighborhood where over 550 households were reported to be displaced in 2017.³³⁵ By utilizing these intermediaries, Huayou absorbs cobalt from unregulated sites where child labor is rampant while remaining structurally insulated from the hazardous conditions on the ground.³³⁶

Once collected, the ore is processed into crude cobalt hydroxide in Lubumbashi and through strategic partners like Chinese company La Compagnie Minière de Musonoie (COMMUS) which ships the bulk of its output directly to Huayou, according to researchers.³³⁷ This material is then exported to China for final refining before being sold to battery giants such as CATL, LG Chem, Samsung SDI, and BYD. These operations are bolstered by Chinese state-backed financing and

insurance, tying Huayou’s sourcing practices to China’s broader strategic pursuit of critical minerals in Africa.³³⁸

Abusive Actions

Investigations indicate that Huayou’s purchasing practices help to sustain a supply chain dependent on child labor,³³⁹ with an estimated 40,000 children—some as young as seven—working in DRC mines.³⁴⁰ These children perform high-risk tasks, including excavating narrow tunnels and washing ore without protective equipment.³⁴¹ Many work alongside their families because households rely on children’s labor to afford basic necessities such as food and medicine.³⁴²

Fatalities are common. In the Tilwezembe mine alone, from which CDM is reportedly a major buyer, at least seven children were reportedly buried alive in a single series of collapses.³⁴³ Survivors often suffer lasting health effects from toxic exposure,³⁴⁴ while some end up working for depot bosses, earning less than two dollars per day and facing extortion by soldiers or debt bondage.³⁴⁵



Congolese children carry sacks of cobalt (left)³⁴⁶ and scavenge for ore with their mother (right)³⁴⁷


Beyond labor abuses, operations within Huayou’s supply chain have also raised serious environmental concerns in the DRC. For example, in November 2025, a retaining wall at a site owned by CDM near Lubumbashi collapsed, releasing toxic acidic waste into nearby waterways.³⁴⁸ The spill reportedly killed thousands of fish and contaminated water sources in a city of roughly three million residents.³⁴⁹

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

As discussed previously in this report, Huayou Cobalt has been linked to underreporting, labor rights and safety violations, and resource depletion at Arcadia Lithium Project, its lithium mine in Zimbabwe.

A Nickel Death Trap in Indonesia

Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park

<i>Location</i>	-2.830321, 122.160021	
<i>Country</i>	Indonesia	
<i>Owner</i>	Tsingshan Holding	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Worker Safety, Labor, Environmental	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Nickel	

Deadly fire engulfs a Tsingshan plant.³⁵⁰

Overview

Tsingshan Holding Group, a CCP-linked metals giant, has repeatedly neglected worker safety at its flagship nickel processing facility, the Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park (IMIP), contributing to dozens of worker deaths and crippling injuries over the past decade. Indonesian laws loosening protections to attract foreign investment in the nickel sector have enabled Tsingshan's dangerous operations at IMIP.³⁵¹

Mining Operations

Tsingshan Holding Group (Tsingshan) is the world's largest stainless-steel producer and one of the largest nickel producers globally, with subsidiaries and processing assets across Indonesia's nickel industry.³⁵²

Tsingshan helped finance and build IMIP—one of Indonesia's largest nickel industrial bases—through its subsidiary Shanghai Decent Investment Group alongside PT Bintang Delapan Group and Sulawesi Mining Investment.³⁵³ Construction of the park began in 2013, when Xi Jinping witnessed the signing of the cooperation agreement during his visit to Indonesia announcing the Belt and Road Initiative's Maritime Silk Road.³⁵⁴ Today, IMIP employs over 120,000 workers and more than 50 companies, including several Chinese firms linked to EV battery supply chains like CATL, Huayou Cobalt, and GEM.³⁵⁵ Public reporting indicates the project received significant Chinese state-backed financing, including a \$1.22 billion investment from the China Development Bank in 2018.³⁵⁶

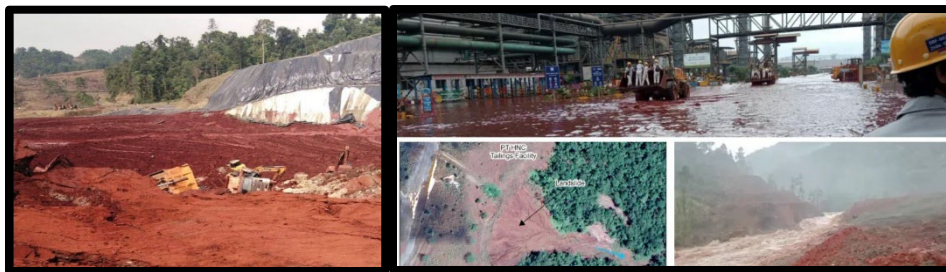
Abusive Actions

Investigations and worker testimony indicate that dangerous conditions and weak safety enforcement are persistent across Tsingshan-

linked facilities at the IMIP. Workers describe a culture of “production first, safety later,”³⁵⁷ where safety procedures are often ignored to meet output targets. Labor unions representing roughly 12,000 workers have accused Tsingshan of failing to provide adequate protective equipment, and a medical worker at an IMIP clinic told reporters that workplace injuries “happen almost daily.”³⁵⁸

Available data suggests the problem is widespread. Between 2015 and 2023, at least 49 workers died in accidents at IMIP, with more than half of those deaths occurring in 2023 alone, according to public reporting.³⁵⁹ Recent incidents include:

- In December 2023, smelting furnace explosion at PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel killed 21 workers and injured 38,³⁶⁰
- In October 2024, a crane operator burned to death after an explosion and fire at another Tsingshan facility in the park;³⁶¹
- In May 2025, two workers died within three days in separate electrocution incidents;³⁶²
- In March 2025, three workers were killed when a tailings storage facility at PT Qing Mei Bang New Energy Materials collapsed after heavy rains;³⁶³
- In February 2026, a tailings landslide at an IMIP disposal site swept away heavy equipment and killed a worker.³⁶⁴



Pictured are a landslide in February 2026 (left)³⁶⁵ and a tailings dam collapse in 2025 (right)³⁶⁶

Taken together, the frequency and severity of incidents at IMIP suggest a broader pattern of negligence that may be underreported. Staff reportedly face pay cuts or disciplinary warnings when accidents occur, creating incentives to conceal incidents and fatalities.³⁶⁷

Some workers have left because the risks are not worth the wages, but others have fewer options.³⁶⁸ Human rights investigations indicate that some Chinese workers have had their passports confiscated — an indicator of forced labor under international law — and many reportedly sign

contracts only after arriving in Indonesia.³⁶⁹ Labor brokers in China have also been accused of misleading recruits about wages, safety conditions, and living arrangements, leaving workers trapped in dangerous jobs far from home.³⁷⁰

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

Tsingshan's abuses have also been documented outside of Indonesia. In 2024, its subsidiary Dinson Iron and Steel Company forcibly relocated more than 100 families in Zimbabwean without compensation to make way for one of Africa's largest steel plants, according to public reporting.³⁷¹ The company has also reportedly polluted communities near its Gwanda Lithium Mine project in Zimbabwe, exposing villagers to hazardous levels of dust and disrupting water supplies.³⁷²

Broken Promises at Las Bambas

Las Bambas Mine

<i>Location</i>	-14.089013, -72.335647	
<i>Country</i>	Peru	
<i>Owner</i>	MinMetals	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Displacement, Environmental, Protest Suppression	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Copper	

Injured protester at Las Bambas.³⁷³

Overview

Since China MinMetals Corporation (MinMetals), a Chinese state-owned minerals giant, purchased Peru's Las Bambas copper mine in 2014, it has reportedly failed to honor commitments to Indigenous communities to provide jobs, development, environmental protections, and a voice in decisions affecting their land. It also expanded across farmland and wetlands communities depend on for survival, polluted rivers, and paid Peruvian police to suppress related protests leading to at least four deaths.

Mining Operations

MinMetals controls the Las Bambas copper mine through a chain of subsidiaries and joint venture partners, all of them Chinese state enterprises, with financing provided by Chinese state banks.³⁷⁴ The company acquired the project in 2014 after its previous owner was required to divest the mine as a condition of an international merger.³⁷⁵ Between 2014 and 2024, Chinese government-linked institutions supplied roughly \$13.5 billion USD to acquire, develop, and operate the mine.³⁷⁶

The operation is one of the largest copper mines in the world, producing about 2 percent of global copper supply from an open pit carved into the Andes at 4,000 meters above sea level.³⁷⁷ It accounts for almost 16 percent of Peru's copper output³⁷⁸ and generated \$1.3 billion USD in EBITDA in the first half of 2025 alone.³⁷⁹ The mine sits in Apurímac, one of Peru's poorest regions, where many Quechua-speaking farmers depend on the same land and water the operation now consumes.³⁸⁰

Abusive Actions

MinMetals, through its subsidiary MMG, has been at the center of conflict with indigenous communities for more than a decade, including for failing to uphold commitments to communities displaced by the expansion of Las Bambas. To build the mine, the project's original developer relocated the entire Fuerabamba farming community—441 families, about 1,600 people—four hours away by car.³⁸¹ The relocation agreement promised new farmland, steady jobs, and university scholarships.³⁸² When MMG later took over the project, many of those commitments went unfulfilled or did not pan out as villagers expected.³⁸³ Their new houses are reportedly drafty and flimsy compared to their old adobe homes.³⁸⁴ Residents have complained that basics like food, water, and fuel, which they previously could glean from the land, now have to be paid for, and many no longer plant crops or tend livestock because the replacement plots provided by Las Bambas are too far away.³⁸⁵ The workforce fell from 10,000 construction workers to about 2,000 permanent operators, most jobs requiring skills local residents did not have.³⁸⁶



Las Bambas copper mine, carved into the Andes Mountains (MMG).³⁸⁷

In one of many protests, in 2022, Fuerabamba residents walked back to their original land to demand promises MMG had failed to keep.³⁸⁸ Joined by the Huancuire community—whose land is slated for a second pit expansion—they occupied the mine site, forcing a 51-day mine shutdown.³⁸⁹

Environmental concerns have also fueled conflict. The mine draws roughly 800 liters of water per second from local rivers.³⁹⁰ A planned expansion would significantly expand the Ferrobamba pit, destroy 12.36

hectares of bofedales—wetlands that regulate regional water supplies—and discharge wastewater into rivers used for drinking water and agriculture, according to analysis by a non-profit organization.³⁹¹ The project’s Environmental Impact Assessment was released between Christmas and New Year’s, written in highly technical language and without a Quechua translation, leaving communities little meaningful opportunity to respond.³⁹²

Additionally, the company pays Peruvian police to secure the mine through a security agreement with Peru’s National Police in place since at least 2015.³⁹³ In September 2015, police assigned to the project shot and killed four Indigenous protesters demonstrating against project changes, according to public reporting.³⁹⁴ Families later received about \$265 USD per month for two years, while the company pursued \$177,000 USD in civil damages and filed criminal complaints against dozens of community members.³⁹⁵ Tensions remain unresolved. In May 2024, police allegedly entered an Indigenous protest encampment before dawn, beat protesters and burned their tents, injuring eight people protesting water contamination and broken relocation promises.³⁹⁶

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

MinMetals is linked to other accusations of abuse around the globe, including allegations of labor abuses and environmental destruction in Papua New Guinea and DRC.³⁹⁷ The Business and Human Rights Centre’s Transition Minerals Tracker recorded 80 allegations of environmental and human rights abuses against MinMetals from 2010-2024, tied for the most of any company tracked.³⁹⁸

Unfortunately, such abuses have not prevented MinMetals’ worldwide expansion. In February 2025, its subsidiary MMG announced the acquisition of Anglo American’s ferronickel operations in Brazil—the Barro Alto and Niquelândia mines in Goiás state, along with two future nickel projects—for approximately \$500 million.³⁹⁹

Displacement and Intimidation at Mirador

Mirador Copper Mine

<i>Location</i>	3.566667, -78.433333	
<i>Country</i>	Ecuador	
<i>Owner</i>	CRCC-Tonglin	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Environmental, Displacement, Harassment	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Copper	

Tailings dam at Mirador Mine⁴⁰⁰

Overview

Ecuacorreinte S.A. (ECSA) holds a decade-long record of community displacement, environmental risk, and violent intimidation while operating Mirador Mine. Its tailings dams have a high risk of collapse, threatening to cover nearby Shuar villages in toxic waste. To clear ground for mining operations, ECSA destroyed entire towns by forcing violent evictions of local native landowners. Shuar protesters face incredible pressure from ECSA, which targets activists and their families with surveillance, intimidation, and material threats to their lives.

Mining Operations

Mirador Mine is Ecuador's first large-scale, open-pit copper mine, located in Zamora-Chinchi province in the Corriente Copper Belt, one of the largest reserves in Ecuador. Copper mining at the mine began in 2019.⁴⁰¹ The mine covers approximately 62,000 acres (6,685 hectares) with reserves of 3.2 million tons of copper, 3.4 million ounces of gold, and 27.1 million tons of silver.⁴⁰² The area overlaps with territory claimed by the Shuar indigenous group.

A Chinese joint venture between state-owned partners China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC) and Tongling Nonferrous Metals (CRCC-Tonglin) bought ECSA in 2010 from Canadian owners.⁴⁰³ Mirador is funded by over \$2 billion in loans including from several Chinese state-owned banks.⁴⁰⁴

Alleged Abuses

ECSA has reportedly ignored warnings about the safety of its two tailings dams while expanding in a watershed upstream of the Amazon basin. If its tailings dams collapse, it could pollute much of the Amazon Basin.⁴⁰⁵ In 2007, consultancy Knight Piésold advised then-Canadian

ECSA that Mirador’s first tailings dam registered as a “very high” risk, noting that its failure could lead to severe loss of life and environmental pollution.⁴⁰⁶ Mirador’s dams are tall and heavy, on weak soil, and subject to high seismicity and precipitation.⁴⁰⁷ Dam expansion to 850 feet in 2023—and then to 1049 feet in 2024—renewed these concerns.⁴⁰⁸ In a 2022 report, scientists called dam failure “inevitable” and predicted 100 million tons in toxic waste spillage.⁴⁰⁹ A 2023 report by E-Tech International, a U.S.-based NGO, simulated up to 100-foot-tall landslides hitting communities in under 15 minutes.⁴¹⁰ The report identifies at least seven Shuar communities in danger.⁴¹¹

ECSA has also reportedly displaced over 200 indigenous families to clear ground for Mirador expansion,⁴¹² including forcibly evicting 32 families in 2015 (Shuar and Cañari-Kichwa) from Tundayme, a local parish of 700.⁴¹³ Locals described evictions as violent and without consultation, with mining representatives arriving at dawn and giving residents five minutes to vacate their properties before demolishing them.⁴¹⁴ ECSA promised compensation, but reports suggest victims were not fully compensated or given relocation assistance.⁴¹⁵ Some unsuccessfully sued ECSA for “cattle raiding,” alleging ECSA failed to return their entire cow herds.⁴¹⁶ The town of San Marcos was reportedly completely cleared and destroyed between 2014 and 2017.⁴¹⁷ Displacements continued into 2022, when an elderly couple was evicted by 25 armed police connected to ECSA.⁴¹⁸



Mirador’s tailings dams (left) have been declared “high risk” (Manuel Novik).⁴¹⁹ Slain Shuar leader José Isidro Tendetza Antún (right) was a vocal critic of Mirador’s environmental risks and ECSA’s forced evictions (CONAIE).⁴²⁰

ECSA has allegedly harassed, intimidated, and threatened the lives of activists vocal against its abuses at Mirador, according to public reporting. In December 2014, local Shuar leader and ECSA critic José Isidro Tendetza Antún was found tortured and strangled to death in a river.⁴²¹ Two ECSA employees were charged with his murder.⁴²² Although charges were later dropped, activists allege state malpractice

and irregularities in Tendetza Antún's murder investigation and prosecution.⁴²³ Tendetza Antún had previously faced harassments from ECSA, and was preparing to present a report on ECSA's abuses at the 2014 Climate Change Conference just before his death.⁴²⁴


Families of activists allege ECSA targets them for evictions.⁴²⁵ One activist filed a criminal complaint in 2020 claiming two ECSA employees broke into his home with weapons to threaten his life.⁴²⁶ In recent years, local activists have reported verbal threats of violence, arson, and burglary.⁴²⁷

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

CRCC-Tonguan faces accusations of similar abuses at the neighboring San-Carlos Panantza mine. Natives allege unfair displacement, environmental risks, and intimidation efforts.⁴²⁸ Due to successful legal challenges and protest disruptions, the project had its environmental license annulled in 2022 but regained it in 2025 for exploratory research.⁴²⁹

Toxic Mining at Ramu NiCo

Ramu Nickel-Cobalt Project

<i>Location</i>	-5.568722, 145.218556	 <p>Ramu NiCo toxic spill.⁴³⁰</p>
<i>Country</i>	Papua New Guinea	
<i>Owner</i>	Metallurgical Corp. of China	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Environmental, Labor	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Nickel, Cobalt	

Overview

Ramu NiCo controls dual mine and plant facilities in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Since the Metallurgical Group of China (MCC) took ownership in 2010, the Ramu project has gained local notoriety for environmental and labor abuses, including discharging waste into the ocean and coercive management practices.

Mining Operations

Ramu NiCo is majority owned by MCC Ramu, which holds 85 percent of the project.⁴³¹ Other minority stakes are held by PNG entities, including Mineral Resources Madang Limited, Mineral Resources Ramu Limited, and Ramu Nickel Limited.⁴³² MCC itself has been owned by the Chinese state-owned giant MinMetals since 2016.⁴³³

The roughly \$2 billion USD project was China's first major investment in PNG, a BRI partner, and remains one of the country's most significant mining ventures, yielding more than 30,000 tons of nickel and more than 3,000 tons of cobalt annually.⁴³⁴ Operations began in 2012 at inland Kurumbukari mine where nickel and cobalt ore are extracted and then transported through a 135-kilometer pipeline to the Basamuk coastal refinery for processing, where waste is then discharged into the ocean.⁴³⁵

Abusive Actions

Ramu NiCo uses the sea as a dumping ground for mining waste. The Basamuk refinery reportedly discharges 1,700 cubic meters of tailings into the ocean every hour.⁴³⁶ Before treatment, that waste had a highly corrosive pH of 1.2 and contained nickel, cobalt, chromium, zinc, arsenic, and other heavy metals.⁴³⁷ Even after dilution, the refinery was estimated to release 77.6 tons of contaminants per hour into nearby waters, where they spread through currents and contaminate fisheries and coastlines.⁴³⁸

Ramu NiCo has also repeatedly polluted coastal waters near its Basamuk facility through major spills. In 2019 alone, the plant suffered at least four reported spills, including a major breach on August 24, 2019, that released about 200,000 liters of tailings into Basamuk Bay.⁴³⁹ The spill turned the water bright red, stained the shoreline, and was later linked to dead fish, a baby dolphin washing ashore, and a temporary ban on fish sales from the bay.⁴⁴⁰ Madang Governor Peter Yama called it “the worst environmental disaster in PNG history,”⁴⁴¹ while an environmental remediation expert later described the lab results as “alarming” and said they showed Ramu NiCo was not properly managing its waste.⁴⁴² When government-backed investigators later tried to inspect the site, mine security reportedly blocked access despite earlier assurances that sampling would be allowed.⁴⁴³



A tailings spill from the Ramu NiCo factory into Basamuk Bay on April 6, 2019 (Alex Mojon).⁴⁴⁴


Ramu NiCo has also faced allegations of labor abuse.⁴⁴⁵ Workers and former employees have alleged unsafe conditions, unpaid overtime, coercive management practices, and retaliation against workers who sought better treatment.⁴⁴⁶ Chinese migrant workers reportedly faced especially harsh restrictions on movement and organizing.⁴⁴⁷ During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company was also accused of pressuring employees to accept vaccines and then refusing to cover medical costs when some became ill.⁴⁴⁸

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

MinMetals has also been linked to other serious abuses abroad, including community displacement and police repression of protesters at Peru’s Las Bambas copper mine and pollution in the DRC.⁴⁴⁹ The Business and Human Rights Centre’s Transition Minerals Tracker recorded 80 allegations of environmental and human rights abuses against MinMetals from 2010-2024, tied for the most of any company tracked.⁴⁵⁰

Dirty Deals with the Taliban

Afghanistan

<i>Location</i>	Various	 <p>Mes Aynak site in Logar Province.⁴⁵¹</p>
<i>Country</i>	Afghanistan	
<i>Owner</i>	MCC, JCC, Others	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Corruption, Displacement, Violence	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Lithium, Gold, Copper	

Overview

Since the Taliban seized power in 2021, Chinese firms have raced to exploit Afghanistan's estimated \$3 trillion USD in untapped mineral wealth—lithium, rare earths, copper, and gold that Beijing views as critical to locking in global supply-chain dominance. The deposits are scattered across remote provinces where the absence of a free press and the Taliban regime's desperation for revenue and recognition have created ideal conditions for extraction far below market value. These deals funnel wealth to Chinese companies, senior Taliban leaders, and their criminal allies while destroying local livelihoods. The pattern is consistent: opaque contracts, systemic bribery, minimal investment, and violence when locals resist.

Mining Operations

Chinese interest in Afghan minerals surged after Beijing opened diplomatic channels with the Taliban in late 2021.⁴⁵² More than 20 state-owned enterprises inquired about lithium projects,⁴⁵³ and in April 2023 the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum announced that Chinese firm Gochin Company had offered \$10 billion USD for lithium and other minerals, including a processing plant.⁴⁵⁴ Shortly afterward the Taliban signed seven additional contracts, worth \$6.5 billion USD covering gold, copper, iron, lead, and zinc across four provinces, with locally-based companies that have foreign partners in China, Iran, and Turkey.⁴⁵⁵

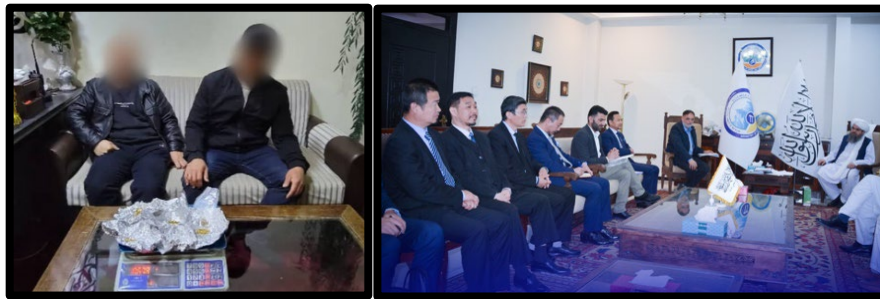
A flagship example is the Mes Aynak copper mine in Logar province, where the Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) and Jiangxi Copper (JCC) hold a contract originally valued at over \$4 billion USD and set to run until 2038.⁴⁵⁶ While MCC and JCC have held rights to this project since 2008, the project was put on hold due to security issues and contract disputes with prior governments, which included MCC backtracking on

promises to build a railway and power station.⁴⁵⁷ Once the Taliban took over Afghanistan, they convinced MCC to return.⁴⁵⁸ Mes Aynak also illustrates Beijing's broader pivot toward short-term, low-commitment projects designed to cap losses if the political situation collapses.⁴⁵⁹

Abusive Actions

MCC and JCC have already reportedly displaced hundreds of families to make way for development of the Mes Aynak mine and residents from seven nearby villages are expected to be evicted involuntarily as the mine expands.⁴⁶⁰ Concerns about water depletion from the mine, pollution, and potential cultural destruction of the ancient Buddhist site that sits atop the mine are rife, amplified by the lack of governance and regulations under Taliban rule.⁴⁶¹

Beyond Mes Aynak, Chinese complicity with corruption in Afghanistan's mining sector is well known.⁴⁶² Chinese critical minerals miners purchase access to land and mineral rights in Afghanistan through layers of bribery, according to local community monitors, who provided information about Chinese mining operations through Libertas Council to the Select Committee.⁴⁶³ There are reports that Chinese firms pay "tens of millions of dollars in contracts and kickbacks" to senior Taliban officials to bypass regulations and secure mineral rights, according to these monitors.⁴⁶⁴ Taliban commanders are reportedly paid a percentage of the extracted minerals,⁴⁶⁵ though some Chinese workers seem to be finding ways around reporting their extraction progress, including two Chinese nationals who attempted to smuggle 1,000 tons of lithium out of the country through Pakistan.⁴⁶⁶



Chinese nationals arrested at Kabul Airport for attempting to smuggle 678 grams of raw gold to gold to China (left).⁴⁶⁷ Gochin meeting with Taliban Officials in April 2023.⁴⁶⁸

Additional mining rights are quietly bought from injured Taliban veterans who were granted mineral-deed certificates as rewards for service, according to community monitors; ostensibly these deeds are purchased for fractions of their real value.⁴⁶⁹

The arrangements also enrich criminal networks. Bashir Noorzai, a notorious drug trafficker convicted in the United States in 2008 and freed in a 2022 prisoner swap, is now reportedly working with Chinese mining firms as an intermediary to broker deals with the Taliban.⁴⁷⁰ Noorzai takes a reported 18 to 22 percent profit cut from both Chinese firms and local partners, suggesting that national wealth is being diverted to traffickers and insiders instead of the public treasury.⁴⁷¹

There are reports of mounting tensions between locals and Chinese-backed mining operators over environmental issues and resentment caused by the Chinese extracting the country's mineral wealth, particularly in rural regions where government and international oversight are absent.⁴⁷² In Badakhshan, Taliban officials and Chinese partners reportedly swept in with heavy equipment and created a large gold mining concession, overtaking villagers who once panned riverbeds with basic tools.⁴⁷³ Workers reported that broad areas are now fenced off and guarded by armed men tied to influential figures, cutting local people off from land and water they previously depended on.⁴⁷⁴

When resistance to Chinese aggression arises, the response can be lethal, according to community monitors. In fall 2025 in remote Shahre-e-Buzurg, Badakhshan, Chinese miners backed by Taliban-linked Kandahari guards in armored Simorgh pick-ups reportedly seized a 65-year-old elder's ancestral land after discovering gold and began excavation over his objections, according to community monitors.⁴⁷⁵ A Chinese official laughed off his protests, named Taliban ministers one by one, and declared none could touch him.⁴⁷⁶ Weeks later the elder returned to confront them again. The official shot him dead on his own land. The Chinese company official paid the family 20 million afghanis in "blood money" reportedly stating "Islamic law offers you much less...be content."⁴⁷⁷ There is nowhere to complain, and the information blackout keeps the story from the outside world, according to a local eyewitness.⁴⁷⁸

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

While some of the Chinese companies operating in Afghanistan, such as Gochin Company, are difficult to trace, MCC is a subsidiary of China MinMetals, which is linked to reported abuses in Peru, Papua New Guinea, and DRC, as discussed elsewhere in this report.

Toxic Mining on the Mekong

Mong Yun Rare Earth & Gold Mining Sites	
<i>Location</i>	20.386916, 99.351446 (Gold) 20.334061, 99.323163 (RE, West) 20.356918, 99.377202 (RE, East)
<i>Country</i>	Burma
<i>Owner</i>	Chifeng Gold; Xiamen Tungsten
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Environmental, Unregulated mining
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Rare Earths, Gold



Overview

Chifeng Jilong Gold Mining Co., Ltd. (Chifeng Gold), a Chinese mining company, has been linked to rapidly expanding, unregulated rare earth and gold mining operations along the Kok River in eastern Shan State, Burma.⁴⁷⁹ Satellite imagery since 2023 shows rapid growth of mining pits, roads, and chemical leaching pools near the river's headwaters.⁴⁸⁰ The mines sit in territory controlled by Burma's military and the United Wa State Army, where environmental laws are not enforced.⁴⁸¹ Downstream water testing in Thailand has detected arsenic at more than double the safe limit, and a Thai government-commissioned study traced the contamination to rare earth mining sites in Burma.

Mining Operations

Chifeng Gold expanded into rare earth development by forming a joint venture with Xiamen Tungsten Co., Ltd., one of China's largest rare earth conglomerates and approximately 40 percent government-owned.⁴⁸² The venture, Shanghai Chijin Xiawu Metal Resources Co., Ltd., was created to develop rare earth resources in Southeast Asia.⁴⁸³

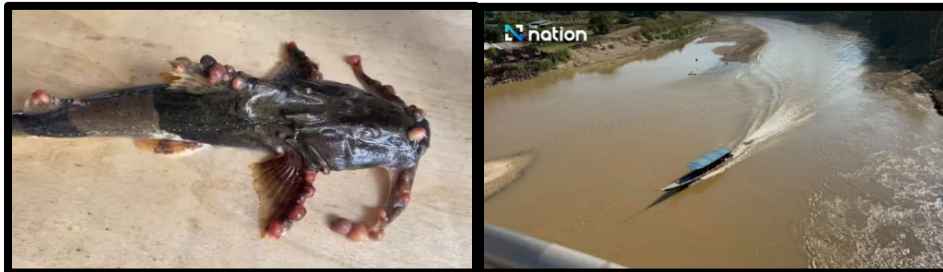
The Shan Human Rights Foundation and independent satellite analysis have identified this same corporate network as the operator of mining sites along the Kok River in eastern Shan State,⁴⁸⁴ where in-situ leaching—a method that injects chemical solutions into hillsides and collects contaminated runoff in surface pools—is linked to heavy-metal discharge into the river system.⁴⁸⁵

The rare earth materials then move across the Chinese border through informal routes that bypass export controls entirely, allowing operators to profit while communities downstream bear the cost.⁴⁸⁶

Abusive Actions

Mining operations in eastern Shan State have poisoned the Kok River with arsenic and lead, sending toxins downstream across the border into northern Thailand.⁴⁸⁷ In April 2025, Thai authorities detected arsenic levels up to 0.026 mg/L along the river—more than double the 0.01 mg/L safety limit, according to reporting.⁴⁸⁸ A Thai government-commissioned study matched the chemical fingerprint of the contamination to rare earth mining sites in Burma, confirming the source.⁴⁸⁹

The Kok River, which border communities have depended on for centuries turned orange.⁴⁹⁰ Fish washed up dead or deformed, residents developed rashes and wounds that would not heal, and two children tested positive for dangerous arsenic levels after eating local fish.⁴⁹¹ Fishermen reported losing more than 70 percent of their income as buyers stopped purchasing local catch,⁴⁹² and authorities banned residents from entering the water entirely.⁴⁹³



Deformed fish (left) and polluted waters in the Kok River (right) highlight downstream impacts of upstream mining contamination.⁴⁹⁴


The contamination also spread into the Mekong River, where arsenic above safe limits was detected at several points along the river.⁴⁹⁵ In July 2025, the Mekong River Commission classified the situation as a “moderately serious” regional water-quality emergency.⁴⁹⁶ Scientists warn the worst is still ahead—arsenic travels as sediment, accumulating over time, meaning communities in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam face growing exposure as mining expands.⁴⁹⁷

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

Chifeng Gold was acquired in March 2026 by Zijin Mining Group,⁴⁹⁸ which has a global track record of abuses, including labor and environmental abuses in Serbia, and forced labor in Xinjiang, China.

Wanbao's Military Mines

Monywa Copper Project

<i>Location</i>	22.078889, 95.084722	
<i>Country</i>	Burma	
<i>Owner</i>	Wanbao Mining	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Support of military junta, Violence, Displacement	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Copper	

Letpadaung Copper Mine.⁴⁹⁹

Overview

Wanbao Mining, subsidiary of Chinese state-owned defense company NORINCO, is a mining company operating large-scale copper projects in Burma since 2010.⁵⁰⁰ Through a joint venture with the Burmese military, Wanbao's operations have repeatedly served as bases for violent repression, forced displacement, and attacks on civilians.⁵⁰¹

Mining Operations

Wanbao Mining operates in Burma primarily through the Letpadaung copper mine, which is part of the broader Monywa Copper Project.⁵⁰² The Letpadaung mine is jointly owned by Wanbao, the Burmese government, and the military-owned conglomerate Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEHL). Under the project's profit-sharing arrangement, 51% of revenues goes to Burma's No.1 Mining Enterprise, 30% to Wanbao, and 19% to UMEHL, directly funneling proceeds to the military establishment.⁵⁰³ Both UMEHL and No.1 Mining Enterprise are sanctioned by the U.S. government.⁵⁰⁴

Abusive Actions

Wanbao's operations provide substantial financial support to Burma's military, which has been linked to numerous crimes against humanity. Burma's exports of copper to China totaled \$216 million USD in 2024, according to United Nations data, and estimates suggest that in the 2020–2021 fiscal year, the military may have received \$417 million USD from Letpadaung and \$187 million USD from Wanbao's Sabetaung and Kyisintaung (S&K) mines.⁵⁰⁵

Wanbao's deep junta ties are also operational, as evidenced by the militarization of its mining facilities. Following Burma's 2021 military coup, junta troops reportedly guard and patrol the facilities to enforce

mine security: by September 2023, an estimated 200 soldiers were based within the Letpadaung compound.⁵⁰⁶ Wanbao also allegedly allows its compounds to be used for artillery deployment and training pro-junta militias, including the Pyu Saw Htee.⁵⁰⁷ Each time copper convoys travel to or from the mine, junta forces reportedly conduct “clearance operations,” shelling nearby villages to secure transit routes.⁵⁰⁸

This ostensible mine security has resulted in extreme violence against surrounding communities. On June 21, 2022, troops operating from the Wanbao mine led an assault on Moe Gyo Pyin North village, brutally murdered two men, held 20 villagers hostage, and burned down approximately 70 homes, according to public reporting.⁵⁰⁹ Less than a year prior, on December 7, 2021, troops guarding the mine allegedly burned 10 villagers alive in what became known as the Don Taw Village massacre.⁵¹⁰ Across 2022–2023, Myanmar Witness found that at least 21 villages near Letpadaung were partially or fully burned,⁵¹¹ with some reports alleging over 1,000 homes destroyed in 17 villages.⁵¹² One of the most recent assaults on Salingyi township was on October 17, 2025, with thousands of residents from 15 separate villages being forced to flee.⁵¹³



Two Wanbao employees murdered by military forces (left)⁵¹⁴ a June 2024 protest against Wanbao’s operations (middle)⁵¹⁵ and an injured protestor(right)⁵¹⁶


Furthermore, Wanbao’s mining operations have forcibly displaced Burmese villagers. The Letpadaung mine occupies 6,785 acres and required the complete relocation of four villages to build.⁵¹⁷ A more recent expansion, in August 2023 caused forced evictions from three villages, with reportedly minimal compensation or reallocation assistance.⁵¹⁸

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

Wanbao’s parent company, NORINCO, besides allegedly funding the Burmese military with weapons transfers, was recently found to be indirectly arming Sudanese RSF forces, thereby contributing to the deadly conflict and breaching a UN arms embargo, through its weapons sales to the UAE.⁵¹⁹

Fraud and Plunder in Namibia

Xinfeng ML 243 Lithium Project

<i>Location</i>	-21.430832, 14.479151	 <p>Miners in Uis.⁵²⁰</p>
<i>Country</i>	Namibia	
<i>Owner</i>	Xinfeng Investments	
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Environmental, Corruption	
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Lithium	

Overview

Xinfeng Investments (Pty) Ltd. (Xinfeng) fraudulently secured mining rights through permits intended for small-scale miners to build an industrial lithium operation, and exported tens of thousands of tons of unprocessed ore to China in ways that undercut Namibia's beneficiation policy.⁵²¹ The company also destroyed ancestral graves, disrupted land in the Tsiseb Conservancy, and advanced mining activity without meaningful community consent.⁵²²

Mining Operations

Xinfeng Investments operates in Namibia's mineral-rich Erongo Region, with key operations near Uis in the Karibibi-Uis pegmatite belt.⁵²³ It is a subsidiary of Tangshan Xinfeng Lithium Industry Co., Ltd. (Xinfeng Lithium), which operates a facility in Hebei with capacity to produce 20,000 tons of lithium battery materials.⁵²⁴ Xinfeng Lithium has also partnered with a CATL subsidiary to produce lithium carbonate.⁵²⁵ CATL is the world's largest electric-vehicle battery maker,⁵²⁶ and the U.S. Department of War has designated it a Chinese military company.⁵²⁷

In Namibia, Xinfeng has mined hard-rock lithium through open-pit extraction and focused on producing and exporting lithium ore and concentrate. Under Mining License 243, the company projected it would process roughly 300,000 tons of ore per year into spodumene concentrate for export.⁵²⁸

Abusive Actions

Xinfeng built an industrial lithium mine by abusing permits meant for small-scale miners. Rather than obtaining the full mining license required and environmental impact assessment, Xinfeng partnered with Long Fire Investments to acquire ten small-scale mining claims intended for

artisanal miners.⁵²⁹ The company then deployed heavy machinery, blasting, and high-volume trucking to run what was effectively an industrial mine while avoiding the scrutiny that should have accompanied a full environmental impact assessment.⁵³⁰

Xinfeng also used plagiarized and misleading data from a competitor to secure Mining License 243. Namibia’s Ministry of Mines determined that the company’s application incorporated geological information copied from competitor Desert Lion Energy and plagiarized material from academic sources.⁵³¹ These findings formed the basis of attempted cancellation.⁵³² In 2023, the ministry concluded that the technical documentation supporting the license contained material misrepresentations and moved to cancel it.⁵³³ Although the High Court later ruled to reinstate the license on procedural grounds, the underlying fraud allegations remained.⁵³⁴

Xinfeng exported lithium in ways that undercut Namibia’s beneficiation policy to avoid paying taxes. After Namibia imposed a moratorium in June 2023 on exports of unprocessed critical minerals, Xinfeng sought to ship roughly 55,000 tons of crushed lithium ore as so-called “industrial testing samples.”⁵³⁵ That volume far exceeded any plausible testing need. By exporting raw ore instead of processing it in Namibia, Xinfeng paid only a 2 percent royalty and bypassed the government’s effort to keep more mineral value inside the country.⁵³⁶ In December 2024, the Ministry of Mines found that Xinfeng was conducting unauthorized extraction of lithium well beyond the scope of its exploration permit.⁵³⁷


Xinfeng is also accused of destroying ancestral graves and endangering wildlife. By operating under exemptions tied to artisanal claims, the company avoided the heritage mapping and ecological review normally required under Namibia’s Environmental Management Act.⁵³⁸ Community leaders reported that excavators destroyed ancestral graves in the Tsiseb Conservancy, prompting protests and demands from local chiefs that the company remove its equipment.⁵³⁹ Residents also reported that blasting and heavy trucking disrupted wildlife central to eco-tourism and trophy hunting, replacing a renewable source of community income with short-term extractive activity.⁵⁴⁰

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

Xinfeng Lithium’s mining operations outside Namibia are limited.

Sickness and Exploitation at Tenke Fungurume

Tenke Fungurume Mine	
<i>Location</i>	-10.568411, 26.195633
<i>Country</i>	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
<i>Owner</i>	China Molybdenum (CMOC) Group Limited
<i>Abuse(s)</i>	Environmental, Labor, Fraud
<i>Mineral(s)</i>	Copper, Cobalt



Tenke Fungurume Mine.⁵⁴¹

Overview

China Molybdenum (CMOC)'s Tenke Fungurume Copper-Cobalt Mine (TFM) in the DRC is linked to dangerous levels of air and water pollution and the displacement of thousands of nearby villagers. CMOC also exploits its workers and was caught underreporting its mineral exports, cheating the DRC government out of billions of dollars.

Mining Operations

TFM is in the Southeastern Lualaba Province of DRC. It began producing copper in 2009 and is one of the biggest and highest-grade copper-cobalt deposits in the world.⁵⁴² TFM is owned and operated by Chinese mining giant CMOC Group Limited.⁵⁴³ Under CMOC's control, TFM has expanded aggressively amid surging copper and cobalt demand.⁵⁴⁴

CMOC acquired a 56% stake from U.S.-based Freeport-McMoRan in 2016 as part of a \$2.65 billion USD deal and then acquired additional private shares to achieve 80% ownership and decisive control in 2019.⁵⁴⁵ Gecamines, the DRC state-owned mining company, owns the remaining 20% of shares.⁵⁴⁶ CMOC produces almost half the cobalt in the world through its mining operations in the DRC, including output from TFM and the Kisanfu mine.⁵⁴⁷

Abusive Actions

CMOC has reportedly caused a public health crisis in the villages surrounding the TFM mine, allegedly by dumping toxic waste in the Kabombwa River⁵⁴⁸ and releasing toxic levels of sulfur dioxide into the air.⁵⁴⁹ This pollution and resulting health dangers have been linked to

TFM's lime factory, which was commissioned in 2020.⁵⁵⁰ Studies have found dangerous levels of air and water pollution in the villages surrounding TFM. Most recently, the Environmental Investigations Agency (EIA) commissioned independent air monitoring of the area from September 2024 to January 2025, and found levels of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) – a toxic gas produced during the processing of copper-cobalt ore – well in excess of international standards.⁵⁵¹ SO₂ exposure reportedly harms respiratory and lung function, and is associated with increased rates of infant deaths.⁵⁵²

In Kabombwa, a town about 8 miles downstream from TFM, pollution from the nearby TFM mine was linked to the deaths of 11 people and several significant illnesses between 2020 and 2022.⁵⁵³ An analysis of 1,200 health records by EIA investigators and independent medical experts found that, since 2023, doctors and nurses near the mine have treated a growing flow of patients for coughing up blood and severe respiratory illnesses like pneumonia and bronchitis.⁵⁵⁴ According to these investigators, the data show a progression from an initial child-dominated pattern to later distributions of adults and adolescents, which suggests worsening environmental exposure over time.⁵⁵⁵



Fumes seen emanating from TFM's operation from Manomapia (left);⁵⁵⁶ toxic sulfuric acid spilled on the ground in DRC (top right),⁵⁵⁷ and houses demolished in Manomapia to prevent residents from returning (bottom right).⁵⁵⁸

In 2024, the village of Kabombwa was abandoned, and its approximately 3,000 inhabitants displaced, because the river intoxication had made the village essentially uninhabitable.⁵⁵⁹ Additionally, about 5,000 people from the Manomapia village were also reportedly relocated between April 2024 and January 2025 due to mounting concerns about pollution coming from the plant.⁵⁶⁰ Separately, CMOC displaced 4,500

inhabitants between July 2022 and September 2023 from Kalweji village to clear space for a new mixed-ore processing complex.⁵⁶¹

CMOC has also been accused of a range of labor abuses, enabled at least in part by CMOC's reliance on subcontractors to indirectly hire its workers, giving the company impunity from legal obligations, including worker safety.⁵⁶² According to a 2021 analysis, 68% of total TFM employees were hired by subcontractors; many direct workers received wages more than three times that of similar subcontracted workers.⁵⁶³ In general, workers hired by subcontractors are given short-term contracts or no contract at all, leaving them with little to no benefits, much lower pay, excessive work hours without overtime, limited ability to unionize, and workers can be fired at a whim.⁵⁶⁴

Workers contrasted the exploitation by TFM with their treatment by the prior American owners, Freeport McMoran, noting significantly deteriorated safety standards under CMOC leading to several significant, avoidable injuries and deaths, and generally poor treatment.⁵⁶⁵ Since CMOC took ownership of the mine, it reportedly reduced the price it was willing to pay for subcontracted labor by 40%, and the length of contracts dropped from four years to one year.⁵⁶⁶ A June 2025 investigation confirmed that these troubling conditions persist, with workers reporting despair about being trapped in exploitative conditions without other options, with one saying "Here, we say, if there is no tree to hold onto, you grab the snake."⁵⁶⁷

In 2022, CMOC was accused of underreporting its exports of minerals from TFM, with its Gecamines partner alleging that it owed \$7.6 billion USD in royalties and interest; the two firms settled in 2023, with CMOC agreeing to \$2 billion USD in payments and dividends.⁵⁶⁸ This, along with underreporting at other mines, contributed to a loss of \$198 million USD in funding that should have gone to local communities around the mines between 2018-2023, according to DRC's Court of Auditors.⁵⁶⁹

Other Global Allegations of Abuse

CMOC is diversifying its mining portfolio globally, including seeking to develop lithium assets in Bolivia as part of the Hong Kong CBC consortium.⁵⁷⁰ CMOC's (and partners) not-yet-finalized contract has come under scrutiny due to failures to conduct a required Environmental Impact Assessment Study and to obtain free, prior, and informed consent from indigenous communities.⁵⁷¹

PART IV: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no easy solution to stopping the abuses of Chinese mining companies. There are an array of international accountability frameworks, programs, and standards that have attempted to address environmental and human rights abuses in the critical minerals sector. The Select Committee did not attempt to comprehensively analyze the use, application, and critiques of these standards. However, since they are voluntary and non-binding, their value is fundamentally limited in controlling the behaviors of bad actors, particularly those of Chinese state-owned and linked companies who generally operate outside of these Western frameworks. Instead, the Select Committee offers several policy recommendations to increase competitive, regulatory, and political pressure on Chinese companies.

1. **Offer a better option to countries seeking investment in their critical minerals sectors—specifically, critical minerals partnerships with the U.S. and American companies that will respect the laws and regulations of the host government, operate transparently, protect the environment, and add value to local communities.**

To ultimately counteract the abuses of China's mining companies, the United States must offer a viable alternative to nations who are desperately seeking investment and partnerships to develop their critical mineral resources. The recent strategic partnership between the U.S. and the DRC is a promising start and model to consider going forward. In its first report in the critical minerals series, the Select Committee also made numerous policy recommendations intended to strengthen America's critical minerals sector, supply chain, and companies. Addressing these recommendations will better position U.S. companies to compete against the abusive practices of China's Minerals Mafia.

2. **Continue developing alternative, Western, and sovereign supply chains.**

The Minerals Mafia furnishes the critical upstream inputs for China-dominated supply chains that undermine American national security. Actions to reduce over-reliance on Chinese industry, in sectors from electric vehicles to display screens, will also generate the demand necessary to create and sustain alternate

sources of minerals supply that are free of the atrocities and corruption of the Minerals Mafia. The United States should sustain whole-of-government efforts, and enlist its allies and partners, to foster supply chains from raw inputs to finished goods that are not manipulated by Chinese industrial policy, dominated by Chinese state champions, and controlled by the CCP.

3. Provide technical assistance to foreign governments to improve governance and transparency in their mining sectors.

Short of strategic partnerships, the U.S. government should identify opportunities to provide technical assistance to build the capacity of foreign governments to oversee and regulate their mining sectors. As one example, corruption-plagued Zimbabwe does not yet have a functional and transparent electronic mining cadastre but has announced its intention to implement one. Situations such as this may present opportunities for the U.S. to offer meaningful assistance to governments to strengthen, professionalize, and bring transparency to their mining sectors in a way that benefits U.S. and other law-abiding critical minerals companies.

4. Support and fund independent organizations to monitor and expose the abuses of Chinese mining companies.

Due to China's influence over the media environment and government officials in many countries, mining abuses may go unreported or underreported. The U.S. State Department should identify opportunities to fund reputable, independent CSOs to systematically monitor and report on Chinese mining abuses in local communities. The purpose of such efforts would be to increase political pressure on government leaders to hold Chinese companies accountable and ultimately deter such behavior by imposing a high reputational cost.

5. Seek sanctions for Chinese government and mining company officials engaged in corruption and gross human rights violations in the mining sector.

The U.S. government should consider imposing economic sanctions and visa bans on Chinese government and mining

company officials who are engaged in or facilitating corruption and gross human rights violations, using authorities such as the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and Executive Order 13818.

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and MML. Each committee comprises 10 members, five female and five male, including youth representation, structured around key roles including a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Vice-Secretary, Treasurer, and four committee members. Members serve a two-year term, after which fresh elections are held. Documentation on file with the Select Committee.

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