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Mining company helped police kill villagers in 2012 Guinea massacre

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N'ZÉRÉKORÉ, GUINEA – International mining consortium Vale-BSG Resources deliberately supported police and military forces who committed a 2012 massacre at Zoghota, a village in southern Guinea, according to a complaint filed today with Guinean authorities. For its role in the violence, villagers and local human rights group Les Mêmes Droits pour Tous (MDT) have asked the Guinean government to hold Vale-BSG Resources responsible for murder, assault, torture, and destruction of property, among other crimes.

Just after midnight on 4 August 2012, Guinean security forces entered the town of Zoghota, firing wildly. They killed six villagers, wounded several others, burned homes, and stole personal property. “They came at night, while the people were sleeping,” said Kpakilé Gnédawolo Kolié, the President of the community, who is also the leader of the collective of victims of the massacre. “We were woken up by the sound of bullets, and when people went outside to see what was happening, they gunned our fathers and brothers down.” Some villagers who were arrested during the attack were tortured by soldiers who cut them on their arms, necks, and wrists. Security forces arbitrarily arrested and tortured Zoghota residents before and after the massacre, as well.

The attack was retaliation for a large-scale protest over employment practices and environmental destruction at the Zoghota mine. During the protests, villagers from several of the communities surrounding the mine – led by the residents of Zoghota village – occupied the mine site and were accused of destroying company property.

According to information gathered by MDT, Vale-BSG Resources closely coordinated with the Guinean security forces in the massacre:

- *The company helped to plan the action of the security forces.* Evidence shows that the round-ups and beating of villagers began immediately after corporate executives met with government representatives and security forces commanders who carried out the abuses.
- *The company provided crucial logistical support to the security forces.* Multiple witnesses reported seeing company employees refueling security force vehicles in the hours before the attack, and the company committed to provide vehicles to arrest those responsible for the protests.
- *The company continued to collaborate with the security forces, even after the massacre.* Hours after the attack on Zoghota, security forces traveling toward Zoghota in a Vale vehicle were turned

back by villagers in neighboring Mahouon. In the following days, security forces in Vale vehicles arrested people from both Zoghota and Mahouon.

The massacre was never investigated by Guinean authorities, and security forces and the company provided conflicting explanations for the killings. “The official version never made any sense,” said Me Frédéric Foroma Loua, the victim’s lawyer. “The police and army said it was a legitimate arrest mission and not a punitive attack, and the company said they had nothing to do with it. But these claims don’t match with the evidence we’ve seen.” said Jonathan Kaufman, Executive Director of Advocates for Community Alternatives, a Ghana-based human rights organization that supports MDT and the people of Zoghota

MDT filed a criminal complaint against several security forces commanders in 2013, but the case never advanced. Most of the defendants refused to appear before a judge to answer for their actions, and the file was eventually transferred to a military tribunal, where it languished. The company’s responsibility had never been fully investigated until the new evidence of corporate involvement came to light. “Multinational companies have an obligation to obey the law and responsibility to respect the rights of people and their property,” noted Kaufman.

“More than five years have passed since the Zoghota massacre, and thanks to the failures of the Guinean system, we’re no closer to justice than we were in 2012,” said Foromo Frédéric Loua, a Guinean attorney and President of MDT. “We call on the justice system to swiftly respond and open an investigation to finally get to the bottom of the crimes that were committed here.”

Les Mêmes Droits pour Tous (MDT) – MDT focuses on the defense and promotion of human rights; it was founded by Guinean lawyers and young professionals in the legal industry to fight human rights violations in Guinea. MDT conducted the first fact-finding mission to arrive on the site of Zoghota after the massacre and has been supporting the villagers in their search for justice since 2013.

Advocates for Community Alternatives (ACA) – ACA helps West African communities that are threatened by the destructive impacts of extractives-led development to take control of their own futures. ACA works directly with communities to design their own sustainable development plans and advocate to achieve those plans, and it builds and supports networks of lawyers and other professionals that will serve communities in need. ACA is providing strategic legal support to MDT as part of their participation in the Public Interest Lawyering Network for West Africa (PILIWA), which ACA coordinates.