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Licensed to exploit: Community and labour exploitation by Chinese-owned companies in Nigeria's extractives sector

By Malik Samuel

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an investigative assessment of the environmental, social, labour, and land-related practices of two Chinese-owned extractive companies operating in Nasarawa State, Nigeria: Avatar New Energy Materials Company Limited and Hong Tai Quarry Company Limited.

The study documents deliberate, systemic, and sustained patterns of exploitation enabled by weak regulatory enforcement, elite capture, and pronounced power asymmetries between foreign capital and host communities and workers.

The report finds that Avatar New Energy Materials Company Limited operates in open violation of the Nigerian Labour Act and Nigeria's international obligations under International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 98. Workers are subjected to excessively long working hours without legally mandated breaks, denied written contracts, sick leave, health insurance, and annual leave, and exposed to hazardous working environments without adequate occupational health safeguards.

The company enforces an explicit prohibition on unionisation, with dismissals used as a tool of intimidation and control. These practices amount not merely to regulatory non-compliance but to a coercive labour regime that externalises health, social, and economic costs onto workers while maximising corporate output and profit.

Hong Tai Quarry Company Limited, by contrast, exemplifies a parallel pattern of community-level exploitation. Although operating under a formally executed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Gurku

chiefdom, the company has systematically failed to implement the substantive obligations contained in that agreement. Environmental degradation from blasting and dust pollution has damaged homes, compromised public health, and disrupted education, while promised social investments – road rehabilitation, bursaries, water infrastructure, and employment quotas – remain largely unfulfilled. The MoU has functioned less as a social contract and more as an instrument for securing social licence and operational access while deferring accountability indefinitely.

Beyond labour and community relations, the report further identifies economically imbalanced land lease agreements associated with Hong Tai Quarry that, while legally valid, produce outcomes consistent with economic dispossession. These long-term leases lock landowners into low and inflation-eroded compensation, strip them of livelihood opportunities, and transfer disproportionate economic value to the company without mechanisms for renegotiation, livelihood restoration, or environmental remediation.

Taken together, these findings reveal a pattern of deliberate exploitation by foreign companies that leverage Nigeria's enforcement gaps, governance weaknesses, and internal community power imbalances to normalise abusive practices. Unless decisively addressed, such conduct threatens Nigeria's stated ambition to build an ethical, value-adding, and development-oriented extractive sector. The report concludes with targeted recommendations for government regulators, the companies involved, diplomatic and business actors, civil society, and affected communities, aimed at restoring accountability, protecting rights, and preventing the entrenchment of extractive abuse under the guise of foreign investment.

Introduction and context

Lithium stands at the heart of the global energy transition, powering the electric vehicles and battery storage systems essential for a clean energy future. However, its path from mine to market is one of remarkable growth, stark volatility, and mounting strategic concerns, a reality laid bare in the International Energy Agency’s 2024 Global Critical Minerals Outlook report¹.

Demand is nothing short of explosive, projected to quadruple by 2030 and potentially grow ninefold by 2040 as the EV revolution accelerates. Yet, this soaring demand is met by a dangerously concentrated supply chain. Just three countries, Australia, Chile, and China, control the lion’s share of mining, while China alone dominates the complex refining of raw ore into battery-grade chemicals.

This reliance on so few actors creates profound vulnerability, exposing the world’s clean energy ambitions to price shocks, trade disputes, and geopolitical instability.

It is against this tense backdrop that the global race for lithium has taken a decisive turn toward Africa, with Nigeria – with \$34 billion worth of lithium deposits² – emerging not just as a new frontier, but as a nation that intends to reshape its role in the supply chain.

Since coming to office, one of the key areas of focus for the current Nigerian government’s revenue drive has been the revival of the country’s solid minerals sector. A major part of that reform is a crucial policy shift: the insistence on value addition through the local processing of raw materials, moving decisively away from the colonial-era model of simple extraction and export. According to the government, this mandate has already attracted over \$1.3 billion in Chinese investments into the country’s lithium processing sector³.

This domestic ambition can transform Nigeria from a passive resource deposit into a strategic and self-interested player in the global lithium scramble. For the United States and its allies, investing here has become a strategic imperative to diversify supply chains. Legislation like the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act ties lucrative EV tax credits to batteries sourced from “friendly” nations⁴, and Nigeria’s push to build local processing capacity aligns with this goal of creating alternative, “friend-shored” pipelines.

However, China is playing a different game. Through its Belt and Road Initiative, it has systematically secured mineral assets across Africa. For Beijing, Nigeria’s lithium and its growing processing ambitions represent another critical node to control, extending its dominance from mine to battery cell.

This high-stakes interest is also a race against time. The IEA warns that despite recent price dips, significant supply gaps could soon emerge. Nigeria’s rapid formalisation of the sector, cracking down on illegal mining while organising artisanal miners into cooperatives, aims to capture this opportunity. Solid minerals minister, Dele Alake, projected 2025 to be a record-breaking year, backed by a ₦1 trillion exploration budget to generate credible geological data that attracts serious international investment. With Nigeria now chairing a new African Mineral Strategy Group⁵ to promote local value addition continent-wide, its lithium policy is becoming a central pillar of national economic diversification and a model for African resource sovereignty.

Yet, the risks are as pronounced as the rewards. The monumental challenge of diversification remains. While new projects are emerging, the IEA notes that most new refined supply through 2030 is still expected to come from today’s dominant producers. Nigeria’s nascent processing sector faces immense hurdles in scaling up, competing on

1 International Energy Agency (2024), Global Critical Minerals Outlook 2024, <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/ee01701d-1d5c-4ba8-9df6-abeaac9de99a/GlobalCriticalMineralsOutlook2024.pdf>

2 Business Day (2025), Nigeria’s \$34bn lithium reserves in demand amid global rush, <https://businessday.ng/news/article/nigerias-34bn-lithium-reserves-in-demand-amid-global-rush/>

3 Premium Times (2025), Chinese companies inject \$1.3 billion into Nigeria’s Lithium processing in two years – Minister, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/business-news/831069-chinese-companies-inject-1-3-billion-into-nigerias-lithium-processing-in-two-years-minister.html#:~:text=Lithium%2C%20a%20key%20ingredient%20of,processing%2C%20Mr%20Alake%20said.>

4 Time (2022), The Inflation Reduction Act Will Soon Make it Cheaper to Buy EVs—If They Have North American Batteries, <https://time.com/6206639/electric-vehicle-tax-credits-inflation-reduction-act/>

5 Premium Times, (2024), Nigeria chairs African Mining Ministers Group, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/665964-nigeria-chairs-african-mining-ministers-group.html?tztc=1>



Photo: Nasarawa State Government

Nigeria's senate president commissioning Avatar New Energy Materials Company Limited processing plant.

cost, and ensuring operations meet high environmental and social governance (ESG) standards to attract Western capital. The promise of transformation is real, but so is the risk that a poorly managed boom could lead to conflict or simply reinforce existing dependencies under new terms.

While the Nigerian government rightly focuses on curbing outright illegal mining as a way of maximising the potential in the sector, a more complex and insidious risk is gaining traction: the business practices of the established Chinese mining companies that already dominate the sector's formal landscape. The narrative of raids on illicit operations often overshadows the increasing reports of workers' rights abuses and community exploitation linked to these companies' legal sites.

Beyond the inherent opacity of their financial, operational, and environmental practices, abusive labour conditions pose an additionally profound, long-term concern. These problems not only shield potentially harmful activities but also complicate Nigeria's own strategic aim of maximising domestic value and ensuring responsible development. As more Chinese investments are expected, the challenge is

not just chasing off illegal actors, but effectively regulating the powerful, often opaque legal ones who are central to the sector's future.

Thus, this report focuses on two such companies operating in Nasarawa State – Avatar New Energy Materials Company Limited and Hong Tai Quarry Company Limited – where allegations of malpractice have become pronounced. The report aims to document these practices and highlight the experiences of affected workers and communities. The findings are based on key informant interviews, focus group discussions, reviews of the Memorandum of Understanding between Hong Tai Quarry Company Limited and the community where it operates, lease agreements between the company and landowners, and an analysis against the Nigerian Labour Act and International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 98.

Methodology

This report is based on qualitative field-based research conducted in Nasarawa State between May and October 2025. Data collection relied on a triangulated methodology designed to capture worker experiences, community perspectives, and documentary evidence.

Primary data were gathered through key informant interviews with current and former employees of Avatar New Energy Materials Company Limited, community leaders and residents of Gurku I and Gurku II, youth representatives, and other local stakeholders. Focus group discussions were conducted with affected community members to document collective experiences of environmental impact.

Documentary analysis formed a central component of the research. This included a detailed review of the Memorandum of Understanding between Hong Tai Quarry Company Limited and the Gurku chiefdom, lease agreements between the company and individual landowners, and relevant Nigerian legal instruments, particularly the Nigerian Labour Act. These documents

were analysed against international labour standards, notably ILO Convention No. 98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining.

Secondary sources, including policy statements, official government pronouncements, and international reports such as the IEA’s Global Critical Minerals Outlook, were used to situate the findings within broader sectoral and geopolitical contexts. All testimonies were anonymised to protect respondents from retaliation.

Engagement with company representatives was not possible in either instance. At Avatar, a company representative met the research team at the entrance, after being informed of the purpose of the visit, and collected the team’s contact details, stating that the company would respond if it decided to make any comments. At Hong Tai, the security guard also denied the research team access to the quarry, explaining that the site manager was unavailable and that he was the only person authorised to speak to the team or to permit entry to the premises.



Avatar New Energy Materials Company Ltd.

Photo: Eggon News

Avatar New Energy Materials Company and labour rights abuses

As one of the biggest Chinese companies to enter Nigeria's lithium mining field under Nigeria's reformation of the mining sector, Avatar's arrival was greeted with optimism. By situating, reportedly, the largest lithium processing plant in Africa in Nigeria⁶, the optimism was not misplaced, as the expectation was that Avatar would not just mine but also locally refine the lithium, thereby adding more value to the mineral.

The "500-million-dollar turnover" company with a production capacity of 4,000 metric tonnes per day⁷, Nasarawa state governor stated, "(is) happy, and they have seen enough potential to mine lithium in the region for the next 15 to 20 years". The governor stated this when President Bola Tinubu welcomed the leadership of Avatar and Canmax Technologies in Abuja. Canmax is a "world-leading lithium-ion battery materials"⁸ producer and plans to invest \$200 million in lithium processing in the state.

What all this meant for both the federal and state governments was increased revenue generation and the creation of jobs for Nigerian youths. However, while Nigeria continues to bask in the euphoria of its reforms paying off,

the same cannot be said for the workers toiling daily to make this happen.

During field trips to Nasarawa local government area, current and former workers recounted horrible and inhumane working conditions characterised by fear, threat of sack, neglect and other mistreatments.

Workers, primarily in the stone crushing and washing department, one of the most critical departments in the company, said they are subjected to 12-hour shifts without any breaks. Resting during a shift is grounds for immediate dismissal. The company provides no employment letters; engagement is based on details of employees being entered into a computer and the issuance of an ID card.

Contrary to vacancy advertisements, workers claimed that the company does not provide health benefits, including health insurance. If a worker falls ill, they are given a day off without pay and must return the next day to report on their condition before being sent home again if need be.

A former employee of the company provided a firsthand account of the severe health impacts linked to working there. His primary duty involved water pumping from pits. According to him, following prolonged exposure in the pits, he developed acute health complications so severe that he



Photo: Premium Times

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu welcoming officials from Avatar New Energy Materials Company Ltd to the State House.

6 Nasarawa State Government (2024), Avatar to build second lithium factory in Udege, <https://nasarawastate.gov.ng/avatar-to-build-second-lithium-factory-in-udege/>

7 Business Day (2024), Tinubu welcomes Nigeria's largest lithium plant, https://businessday.ng/news/article/tinubu-welcomes-nigerias-largest-lithium-plant/#google_vignette

8 Canmax (undated), Business Domain, <http://en.canmax.com.cn>



Photo: Newswire Daily

Commissioning of Avatar New Energy Materials Company Ltd.

was forced to resign to seek treatment. Three months into his recuperation, Avatar had not assumed responsibility for any associated medical costs beyond paying his full salary for the month he resigned, leaving the financial burden of his treatment to be covered by his uncle.

His illness was marked specifically by symptoms, including bloody stool, which was why he linked it to working for the company, because, in addition to this, coinciding directly with his period of work in the pits, he had no prior medical history requiring intensive intervention, such as intravenous treatment.

Workers in the crushing and washing department were historically provided bread and sachet water as their daily lunch. According to former employees, this was expected to be consumed during what was termed a “working break,” with no allowance for actual rest. Any worker caught resting risked dismissal unless they agreed to a punitive ₦3,000 (\$2.2) salary deduction.

Many workers began reporting adverse health effects from the bread, including stomach aches, bloating, flatulence, and constipation. They formally requested either an

improvement in the bread’s quality or a change in supplier. When their appeals were ignored, a growing number of workers boycotted the meal, though the company continued to distribute it. Eventually, some felt compelled to resume eating the bread due to hunger, as they could not perform strenuous labour on an empty stomach.

Notably, one former staff member reported being dismissed on suspicion of encouraging others to protest the quality of the bread. Since March 2025, the company has discontinued supplying bread and has instead monetised the meal allowance, adding it to workers’ salaries. However, current workers report that the ₦4,000 (\$3) provided monthly, equivalent to less than ₦200 (0.2 cents) per day, is insufficient to purchase adequate food for the month, and does not even cover the cost of a single loaf of bread. This effectively leaves workers without a viable daily meal.

Compensation remains low, with a worker of two years’ service earning ₦80,000 (\$59) monthly, up from a starting salary of ₦60,000 (\$44). Adding to the strain is a coercive shift policy: employees are forced to work on Fridays or Sundays, with refusal leading to a ₦4,000 (\$3) deduction, while acceptance earns double pay. This system pressures

continuous labour and penalises religious or personal observance, as many workers expressed a preference not to work on these days.

Most concerning to the workforce is the strict prohibition of unionisation. Workers face immediate dismissal for merely discussing the formation of a union or cooperative. The sole exception appears to be mining truck drivers, whose specialised skills afford them limited bargaining power. The company reportedly tolerates informal coordination among drivers because arbitrary punishment could trigger collective work stoppages, a disruption the operation cannot afford.

Violation of the Nigerian Labour Act and ILO Convention 98

Avatar's practices constitute multiple, flagrant violations of Nigerian law and international labour standards. Under the Nigerian Labour Act, the failure to provide a written statement of terms of employment within three months contravenes Section 7⁹. The mandated 12-hour shift without a break violates Section 13(3), which requires a rest interval of at least one hour aggregate for work exceeding six hours. The denial of paid sick leave violates Section 16, which entitles workers to up to 12 days of paid sick leave with a medical certificate. The Act also provides for annual leave (Section 18), which is non-existent at Avatar.

The company's anti-union stance is illegal. Section 9(6) of the Labour Act explicitly states that no contract shall make union membership a condition of employment or cause dismissal due to trade union membership or activities. Avatar's policy of sacking workers for discussing unions is a direct breach of this provision. This also violates ILO Convention 98 (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949)¹⁰, which Nigeria is obligated to uphold. Article 1 of the Convention requires "adequate protection" against acts intended to make employment conditional on not joining a union or to cause dismissal for union membership or activities. Avatar's conduct is a textbook example of anti-union discrimination prohibited by both national and international law.

The lack of health benefits and the dumping of medical costs on employees, coupled with the punitive deduction system for missing weekend work, create an environment of coercion and precarity that borders on forced labour.

Hong Tai Quarry Company Limited: Ignoring community grievances and environmental impact

The Gurku community in Karu local government area hosts Hong Tai Quarry Company Limited under a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2021. Gurku consists of two communities located a couple of kilometres apart and broadly corresponding to the two principal ethnic groups in the area.

Gurku I is predominantly inhabited by the Gwandara, while Gurku II is largely made up of the Gbagyi. Although each community has its own traditional ruler, the chief of Gurku I,



Blasting operations allegedly cause buildings to crack.

9 National Electronic Labour Exchange (undated), Labour Act, https://nelex.gov.ng/documents/LABOUR_ACT.pdf

10 United Nations (1951), International Labour Organisation, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2096/volume-96-I-1341-English.pdf>



Photo: Supplied

Hong Tai Quarry site in Gurku community.

who is recognised as a first-class monarch, is regarded as the paramount ruler of the entire Gurku chiefdom, with the chief of Gurku II formally subordinate to him.

The Hong Tai quarry is physically located in Gurku II, yet the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) governing the company’s operations was signed by the paramount ruler at his palace. Palace sources in Gurku II stated that the host community was neither involved in negotiating nor drafting the MoU. According to these sources, Gurku II leaders were summoned to the palace and persuaded of the benefits of hosting a foreign company, including promises of infrastructural development, economic empowerment, and job creation, among others.

Consequently, when the MoU was drafted, the community was not invited to offer input. Instead, the provisions were verbally explained, without access to legal counsel to review the document, after which the paramount ruler signed the agreement on behalf of the entire Gurku chiefdom.

Years after the MoU was executed, the Gurku II community began voicing concerns about its non-implementation. The problem started when the MoU was treated as a confidential document, accessible only to a few members of the traditional council, who were themselves not permitted to retain copies. Those who were allowed to see the document reportedly did not read it in detail; lacking copies, they relied instead on interpretations provided at the palace of the paramount ruler.

The youth association was particularly aggrieved, as the opportunities that had been promised failed to materialise. Like other community representatives, outh leaders were denied access to a copy of the MoU, leaving them to speculate about its contents without any means of verification.

GGA subsequently obtained a copy of the MoU from a palace source, and its contents align with the accounts provided by members of both communities. Visits to the community and interviews with community members revealed discontent centred on environmental degradation and the company’s failure to honour its commitments. Residents reported that blasting operations, conducted two to three times weekly, cause buildings to crack and vibrate violently. The air is perpetually filled with dust and a foul chemical smell, especially when the company blasts rocks, leading to widespread respiratory issues such as catarrh.

The principal of the local secondary school explicitly threatened to evacuate students to the company premises in early 2025 if pollution was not addressed, yet no remedial action was taken. The community feels its complaints have been ineffective, yielding only promises of engagement with the company from the paramount ruler.

The 2021 MoU outlines specific, time-bound obligations for Hong Tai. A comparative analysis of these commitments against community testimony reveals a profound lack of sincerity and execution.

The company committed to upgrading community roads from January 2023, providing an annual bursary grant for five students from 2023, and donating ₦300,000 (\$220) each for Christmas and Sallah celebrations yearly from 2022. It also promised to sink a water borehole within five years of operation and to offer industrial training placements for indigenous students from 2022, with a quota of 30% employment from the community.

Community accounts and reality starkly contradict these obligations and duties. The celebratory grants have been the only obligations met by the company. While the MoU binds the community to provide “peaceful and friendly atmosphere” and indemnify the company against claims from rival claimants, Hong Tai has not upheld its reciprocal, concrete commitments. The MoU’s dispute resolution clause, requiring written notice and escalation, seems like mere words on paper, as such a channel remains inaccessible to a community that feels deliberately ignored by its paramount ruler and exploited by a company they welcomed with open arms.

The community’s stated plan to let the MoU expire in 2026 and not renew it is a direct indictment of the agreement’s failure and the company’s bad faith, with the potential for conflict between the community and the company. Hong Tai clearly views the MoU not as a binding social contract but as a tool to secure operational access while indefinitely deferring its community development responsibilities.

Economic dispossession of land through contract

While the MoU is between Hong Tai and the Gurku chieftdom, the company signed lease agreements with different landowners. Similar to the MoU, the lease agreements are a contractual arrangement that is legally coherent but economically imbalanced in a manner that substantially favours the company over the landowners. A copy of the lease obtained and reviewed by GGA shows features commonly associated with “soft” or “creeping” land grabbing, a term used to describe legally sanctioned transactions that nonetheless produce outcomes similar to dispossession.

This particular agreement grants the company access to the land for a period of 20 years, specifically for use as an

access road supporting its quarry operations. The length of the lease, combined with the fixed structure of the consideration, immediately establishes a long-term lock-in that limits the landowner’s flexibility and ability to respond to changing economic conditions.

From an economic perspective, the lease consideration is notably low when assessed against the opportunity cost of agricultural use of the land. In Nasarawa State and comparable areas in Nigeria’s Northcentral region, smallholder farmers cultivating plots of similar size typically generate annual returns that exceed the yearly value of the lease payment under this agreement. At ₦15,000 (\$11) per plot annually, this figure falls well below the income that could reasonably be expected from the continued cultivation of staple crops such as maize, cassava, or vegetables, even when conservative yield estimates are applied. The economic implication is that the landowner forfeits a potentially sustainable source of livelihood in exchange for a comparatively marginal and static income stream.

The rent escalation mechanism embedded in the agreement further reinforces this imbalance. Although the document provides for a 15% increase after the first five years and nominal increases in subsequent periods, these adjustments are insufficient when measured against Nigeria’s inflationary context. Since 2021, inflation has consistently exceeded the rate of increase provided for in the agreement, meaning that the real value of the lease payments declines over time. Consequently, while the rent appears to rise in nominal terms, it fails to preserve the purchasing power of the landowner’s income over the 20-year duration of the lease. This dynamic disproportionately benefits the company, whose quarry operations are likely to generate increasing returns over time, while the landowner absorbs the erosion of real value.

The agreement’s duration and structure compound this effect. A fixed 20-year term without any provision for periodic market review, renegotiation, or adjustment based on changes in land value or use intensity places the landowner in a rigid contractual position. The maximum that the landowner will make, according to the contract, is ₦30,000 (\$22) per plot annually, and this is only in the last five years of the contract, 2037 to 2041. Given that the land is designated as an access

road for quarry operations, its strategic importance to the company is likely to increase rather than diminish.

However, the agreement does not provide any mechanism for the landowner to capture this added value. Instead, the economic upside created by the company's commercial activity is effectively externalised from the lessor, who remains bound to the original terms regardless of future developments.

An examination of the rights and obligations allocated under the agreement further underscores the asymmetry. The company is granted immediate possession upon execution of the agreement and is empowered to restrict access to the land, including preventing the entry of persons and animals. The lessor, by contrast, undertakes extensive covenants of non-interference and indemnification, including assurances against adverse claims and liability for disputes arising from title defects. While these clauses provide legal certainty for the company, they do not offer compensatory benefits to the landowner. Rather, they function primarily to shield the lessee from operational disruption, reinforcing the commercial security of the quarry's access route.

Notably absent from the agreement are clauses that would ordinarily be expected in land arrangements involving extractive or industrial activities. There is no provision for compensation for loss of livelihood, and no obligation for environmental remediation or land restoration. The absence of such terms is particularly significant given the likelihood that quarry-related traffic and infrastructure will permanently alter the character and utility of the land. In this context, the agreement reflects a narrow conception of lease consideration that does not account for broader economic, social, or environmental impacts borne by the landowner.

Recommendations

To the Nigerian government and regulatory agencies

- Regulatory authorities must undertake immediate inspections, enforce sanctions for labour and environmental violations, audit MoU compliance, and suspend operations where necessary until breaches are remedied.

To the companies

- Both companies must comply fully with Nigerian laws, honour contractual and social obligations, remedy past harms, and establish transparent engagement with workers and communities.

To diplomatic and business actors

- Relevant embassies and business chambers should enforce ethical standards among their nationals, support grievance mechanisms, and cooperate with Nigerian regulators.

To civil society and the media

- Civil society organisations should provide legal support, document abuses, and advocate for enforceable community consent frameworks, while the media should sustain investigative scrutiny.

To affected communities and workers

- Communities and workers should document violations, seek collective support through lawful channels, and engage regulators and public accountability mechanisms despite the risks involved.

Conclusion

The cases of Avatar New Energy and Hong Tai Quarry in Nasarawa State are not isolated incidents but symptomatic of a broader pattern of unethical business conduct enabled by weak enforcement and a power imbalance between foreign capital and local stakeholders. Avatar's brutal violation of labour laws and Hong Tai's disregard for its MoU demonstrate a corporate culture that prioritises profit over people, contract, and law.

If Nigeria's extractive sector is to truly contribute to sustainable development, it is imperative that the government asserts its regulatory authority, that companies are held to the highest standards of accountability, and that the rights and dignity of workers and communities are placed at the centre of all operations. Only through concerted action by government, civil society, the international community, and empowered local actors can ethical business become the norm rather than the exception.



Photo: Olympia Downstream / AFP

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