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Airline broke guidelines

A UK airline broke international guidelines when it flew into an African war zone to transport minerals, the British government has ruled.

The UK National Contact Point, which considers complaints brought under the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, judged that the airline broke a flight ban between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between June 2000 and December 2001.

In a final statement published today, the National Contact Point upheld the complaint lodged by campaign group Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID).

Trade Minister Gareth Thomas said:

“This was a highly concerning case of a company operating in an area where human rights abuses were taking place.

“Such conduct in international trade is unacceptable. The government backs responsible business behaviour and expects British firms to follow international rules.

“Companies operating in conflict areas must take all possible steps to ensure they not only stay within the letter of the law, but also avoid any risk of harming human rights.”

DAS Air flew 35 times between Entebbe airport in Uganda and the conflict zone in eastern DRC at a time when the area was occupied illegally by the Ugandan military. The National Contact Point ruled on the three flights that took place after June 2000, when the current Guidelines came into effect.

These flights contravened the Chicago Convention on aviation, while the firm failed to ensure minerals it transported had not been sourced from the conflict zone.

Notes to Editors

1. The National Contact Point's final statement on the case has been published at www.csr.gov.uk.
2. The OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises set out standards that member states expect business to adhere to, wherever they are trading and operating overseas. The Guidelines cover a broad range of issues in business ethics, including industrial relations, the environment, and corruption.
3. The UK National Contact Point investigates complaints against companies registered in or operating from the UK. If it considers that a company has breached the guidelines it will issue a statement detailing this decision and making recommendations on how the firm can come into line with the guidelines in future.
4. The guidelines are not legally binding, but all OECD members and a number of non-members are committed to promoting adherence to them.

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