

## Press Release

15 December 2000

### Ribbon cutting at UM Korea

#### Chonan plant officially inaugurated

Union Minière's first operating plant in South Korea was officially inaugurated on December 15, 2000 by H.R.H. Prince Philip of Belgium, in the presence of Belgian Foreign Trade Secretary, Annemie Neyts, and UM's senior management.

Dignitaries from the Republic of South Korea and Belgium gathered on Friday, December 15 for the ribbon cutting at UM Korea in Chonan, south of the capital of the country, Seoul.

UM Korea is a 100 % subsidiary of Union Minière of Belgium. The Korean company was incorporated in 1999 and Chonan was chosen to build a manufacturing plant to produce cathode material for rechargeable lithium ion batteries. The plant is ideally located to serve both the Korean as well as the Asian battery industry.

Construction of the 10 million USD plant started in the second half of 1999. In August 2000 it was successfully commissioned by a team of Korean, Canadian and Belgian based UM employees. Soon after the first trial runs UM Korea received its first commercial orders. It is expected that by 2003 UM Korea will have a turnover of 40 million USD.

#### UM has a unique process to manufacture lithium cobaltite

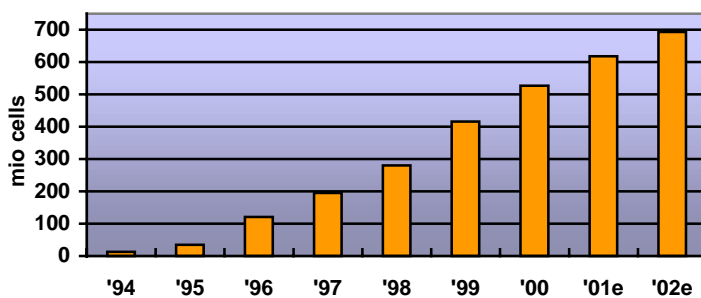
UM Korea manufactures lithium cobaltite, an advanced material used as the cathode in rechargeable lithium ion batteries, the newest generation of rechargeable batteries and which contains 60 % cobalt. The UM Cobalt & Energy Products business unit of Union Minière is one of the world leaders in the extraction and conversion of cobalt into advanced cobalt compounds. Cobalt oxide, the raw material to produce lithium cobaltite, of which Union Minière is the largest producer in the world, is imported from its Olen plant in Belgium and the conversion to lithium cobaltite is done at UM Korea using an in-house developed process. Research and development work started in 1995 and was performed in Olen, Belgium and at UM's Canadian research centre in Fort Saskatchewan. A pilot plant has been operational for three years in Canada.

n.v. Union Minière s.a

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### Lithium-ion batteries : a booming market

The lithium ion battery industry started commercial production in the early nineties in Japan. The explosive growth of mobile communications and computing increased the need for powerful, light-weight, safe and reliable portable power and several battery producers in Asia and the rest of the world have since started production. UM Korea will focus its marketing attention to the market of new and emerging producers of lithium ion and lithium polymer batteries, primarily outside of Japan.



### Part of UM's wide range of battery products

The UM Cobalt & Energy Products business unit of Union Minière offers a very wide range of advanced battery components for primary and secondary batteries. It produces cobalt, nickel, zinc and indium based material in 6 different plants on 3 continents. It supplies materials for each of the main type of consumer batteries: zinc carbon and zinc alkaline batteries, nickel-cadmium, nickel metal hydride and lithium-ion batteries.

Its prominent position is based on a long tradition of close cooperation with leading battery manufacturers in Europe, Asia and the United States, and is supported by UM's 3 research centres in Belgium and Canada.

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## PROFILE

**Union Minière (UM)** is an international metals and materials group, which strives to obtain leadership positions in selected markets. Its activities are centred on 3 business groups: Advanced Materials, Copper & Precious Metals and Zinc. To ensure a rapid response to the market, each business group is divided into several business units and business lines.

The UM Group has industrial operations in Europe, North America, Asia and Africa and serves a global customer base through an international sales network with offices in more than 25 countries.

The underlying principles of UM's strategy across the various business groups are a commitment to technological innovation, operational excellence, recycling and environmental responsibility.

The Group generated a turnover of EUR 3.2 billion in 1999. UM currently employs some 8,000 people.

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