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Sierra Leone: Cutting the link between diamonds and guns

Amnesty International is demanding an end to the international trade in diamonds from rebel-held areas of Sierra Leone. Diamonds from Sierra Leone have been used to fund the transfer of weapons to Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels who have committed widespread human rights abuses in Sierra Leone.

“Governments, companies and trading bodies, particularly the Hoge Raad Voor Diamant (HRD), the Diamond High Council based in Antwerp, Belgium, must take immediate steps to prevent the trade in diamonds mined from areas of Sierra Leone controlled by the RUF”, says Amnesty International. Other major centres of diamond operations—the UK, Israel and India— must take similar steps.

In 1997, The United Nations Security Council imposed an arms embargo on Sierra Leone which was modified in 1998 to apply only to non-government forces. Despite this embargo, there is considerable evidence suggesting the continued supply of weaponry and military equipment to the RUF from several sources, including transit through Liberia and Burkina Faso of weapons from Ukraine and Bulgaria.

Amnesty International has called on all governments to take all possible measures to prevent the transfer of military, security or police equipment, weaponry, personnel or training from reaching rebel forces in Sierra Leone. Such a cessation should include related logistical or financial support for such transfers, should include the monitoring of borders and be supported by stringent UN Security Council measures to enforce the existing arms embargo.

“The enforcement of the embargo must be strengthened through establishment of an independent investigation into diamond trading in the region to ensure that diamond trading from RUF controlled areas is not funding further arms transfers”, says Amnesty International.

In his report to the UN Security Council on 22 May, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: "The Security Council may also wish to consider a strengthening of the sanctions regime, including measures which would prevent RUF commanders from reaping the benefits of their illegal exploitation of mineral resources, in particular diamonds." As part of this process Amnesty International is calling on the Security Council to investigate the origins of diamonds exported from Liberia, Guinea and Cote D'Ivoire to ensure that these are not from rebel held areas of Sierra Leone. These countries should also facilitate the investigation, says the human rights organization.

Amnesty International is also calling upon relevant governments to introduce effective measures to regulate and control trade in diamonds in order to ensure greater transparency about the origin of diamonds. This should include prompt action on the recommendations in the Angola sanctions Panel report to the UN Security Council in March 2000.

The HRD in Belgium and the Central Selling Organisation of the De Beers group in London must take urgent measures to ensure transparency of the trade in order that legitimate diamond traders are not damaged, says Amnesty International.

Amnesty International takes no position on punitive economic sanctions and boycotts, and does not oppose legitimate trade in diamonds. The organization also acknowledges the importance of diamonds for the vast majority of countries engaged in mining the commodity, like South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia.

The Diamond Trade:

The international diamond trade is remarkably centralized, with the De Beers group of South Africa controlling nearly 65% of the world's mining and marketing capacity. (See interview with Senior De Beers official by Amnesty International, May 2000.)

and the Hoge Raad Voor Diamant, or the Diamond High Council, in Antwerp, Belgium, controlling nearly 75% of the world trade in diamonds.(See Angola Sanctions Panel Report to SC: 20th March, 2000.)

Diamonds from Sierra Leone are not critical for the global diamond industry. In fact, according to one estimateWritten testimony before the United States Congress by De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd; House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Africa, May 9, 2000. Also see statement by De Beers at the Kimberly Confrence of diamond mining and trading countries in South Africa, May 11, 2000. , diamonds from Sierra Leone form just over 1% of the total value of diamonds sold worldwide. There has been widespread condemnation of the international diamond trading community's continued inability to come up with an effective mechanism to reassure international consumers and the nations of the world, that the trade is transparent. (See Angola Sanctions Panel Report to SC: 20th March, 2000, mentioned above.)

The world's biggest diamond mining and marketing company, De Beers Consolidated Mines of South Africa, has announced, in February 2000, that it will no longer buy any diamonds sourced from a region controlled by an armed group opposed to the legitimate authority in a country.(See Press Release by De Beers, February 29, 2000.)

Amnesty International calls upon De Beers to allow an independent audit performed by recognised industry experts and government officials to allay international concerns about the source of diamonds in the world market.

Currently in Sierra Leone, diamonds are mined in areas controlled by the RUF, which is reportedly selling the diamonds through Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea. While diamonds are small and can be taken out of a country in a tiny packet, and are variously estimated in value not exceeding \$70 million, the international diamond industry is opaque enough to raise concerns about all statistics from the industry.

There have been periodic calls from the UN and non-governmental organisations for greater transparency in HRD's operations. In the Angola sanctions Panel report to the Security Council it stated that: "The Belgian

authorities have failed to establish an effective import identification regime with respect to diamonds. Nor has any effective effort been made to monitor the activities of suspected brokers, dealers and traders – virtually all of whom appear to be able to travel freely and operate without hindrance”

There have also been concerns expressed by UN officials in meetings with Amnesty International, and in the international media, about the non-transparent nature of statistics of trade in Belgium, particularly regarding the country of origin.(Amnesty International interviews with UN officials in New York, May 2000.)

*In view of the continued failure of the diamond trading community to regulate itself despite concerns expressed at the highest levels of governments and consumers worldwide, Amnesty International calls upon governments to require the international diamond trading community, particularly the Diamond High Council in Belgium, to take immediate steps to make it obligatory for all traders to declare the source of *origin* of the diamonds, and not the last country of shipment.*