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Conflict Diamonds: Jewellers keeping consumers in the dark

A survey of diamond retailers by Amnesty International and Global Witness

A survey out today reveals that almost two years after the diamond industry committed itself to a system of self-regulation to prevent the trade in diamonds from regions of conflict, retailers in the US and UK are still failing to live up to their promises.

The survey of leading diamond companies and stores in the US and UK found that fewer than one in five companies that responded in writing provided a meaningful account of their policy and less than half of diamond jewellery retailers visited in stores were able to give consumers meaningful assurances that diamonds are conflict free.

The results, which are part of a wider ongoing survey, show that the diamond industry has failed to adequately implement a system of self regulation launched in January 2003. The industry's commitment required it to issue written warranties and implement a code of conduct to support the international Kimberley Process Certification Scheme preventing the trade in conflict diamonds.

"The continued lack of systematic monitoring throughout the diamond industry suggests that the industry is not taking the issue seriously enough," said Alessandra Masci of Amnesty International. "The trade in conflict diamonds has been at the heart of some of Africa's most protracted and bloody wars. Diamonds have fuelled conflicts in Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone, destroying nations and costing millions of lives."

Amnesty International and Global Witness sent letters to 85 major diamond jewellery retailers and Amnesty International activists visited 579 stores in the US and UK. The main findings, presented to this week's World Diamond Congress (WDC) in New York, include the following:

Despite an industry commitment to educate employees about company diamond regulations, staff in only 42% of stores were aware of their company's policy.

Out of 85 companies that were sent letters requesting written information about their policies, 48 (56%) failed to respond including major diamond jewellery retailers like Asprey, Theo Fennell and Debenhams in the UK, and Costco Whole Sale Corporation, T.J.Maxx and Kmart in the US.

32 out of the 37 companies that responded (86%) are implementing the system of warranties and have a policy to prevent dealing in conflict diamonds. However 30 of the companies responding (81%) did

not provide adequate details on how the system of warranties is being implemented and audited. The World Diamond Council, the industry body responsible for coordinating industry efforts to tackle conflict diamonds, is still falling far short on adequately monitoring self-regulation implementation on a global level.

Today's results are part of a wider ongoing survey in which more than 800 retailers and suppliers have been contacted in Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands and Switzerland but so far only 52 have responded with information on their policy.

"As the public face of the industry, diamond jewellery retailers must do more to show their commitment to comply with the self-regulation and actively promote compliance by their suppliers," said Corinna Gilfillan of Global Witness. "The World Diamond Council and other key industry bodies must develop a common standard for verifying compliance, and we hope that trade organizations will follow Jewelers of America's recent initiative to monitor its members."

Global Witness and Amnesty International are calling on governments in the Kimberley Process to ensure that the diamond industry fully implements the code of conduct. The Kimberley Process must require that the participating governments carry out rigorous auditing and inspections of companies to ensure the effectiveness of the self-regulation, to guarantee that diamonds do not fund conflict or human rights abuses, and report back to the Kimberley Process in 2005.

For a full report of the survey results please go to:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engpol340082004>
or
<http://www.globalwitness.org>

For more information and interviews please contact:

Amnesty International on +44 207 413 5566
Global Witness on +12022886111 or +442075616397

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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