
Where do diamonds come from?

To many people, diamonds symbolise love, happiness or wealth. But for many, they mean conflict, misery and poverty. In African countries such as Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, the profits from unregulated diamond trade are used to obtain weapons and fund armed conflicts. As a result, tens of thousands of civilians have been killed, raped, mutilated or abducted.

Act NOW to break the link between the diamond trade and

Can this be stopped?

Over the past two years, the diamond industry, some governments and international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) have begun to take steps towards ending the deadly trade in 'conflict diamonds'. However, progress has been too slow and further delays could mean more people killed, tortured or abducted.

Amnesty International, along with dozens of other organisations, is calling for decisive and immediate action to control the diamond trade. Action is needed at both the international and national levels. All countries involved must play their part.

Proof of the origin of diamonds is essential to reassure the consumer that they are not contributing to human rights abuses by buying a diamond. Diamonds

must be monitored from the mine to the point of export and throughout the trading and manufacturing process in other countries.

Amnesty International believes:

- that an international diamond certification system must be established as soon as possible. This must be effective, transparent and legally-binding in all countries;
- that effective national legislation controlling the diamond trade must be introduced in all countries which are involved in the trade, or through which diamonds are smuggled.

Discussions between governments, the diamond industry and other organizations are ongoing, under the "Kimberley process". These aim to design a

certification system in time for discussion at the UN General Assembly in December 2001. Pressure must be applied to governments to ensure they meet the deadline and implement as soon as

possible. The diamond industry must also support these controls at all levels and help implement them.

What can I do to help?

Get support from jewellers selling diamonds to the public:

- go into a jeweller's shop and ask if they know where their diamonds come from
- mention that you are concerned about diamonds contributing to human rights abuses
- say that you would be reassured to see proper certification of origin
- ask them to raise these concerns within the diamond industry in your country

Write to your government representative:

- tell him/her that you are concerned about the link between diamonds and human rights abuses
- say you would like to see controls in place to prove the origin of diamonds
- ask him/her to support an effective and transparent international diamond certification system, through the "Kimberley Process" and at the UN General Assembly in December
- demand legislation to control the diamond trade in your country that will be consistent with the international certification system

Angola

During the three decades of civil war, the armed political group União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola

(UNITA), National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, has benefited from the trade in diamonds to obtain weapons. The weapons are used to sustain UNITA's fight against the Angolan government and contribute to human

rights abuses, including killing and mutilating civilians. Both government forces and UNITA have been responsible for human rights abuses. However, the government finances its military action against UNITA using other sources of revenue to purchase military equipment.

UN sanctions imposed on UNITA in 1998 make it illegal to buy diamonds from UNITA or to sell them weapons. Although UNITA's diamond trade has been reduced by these sanctions, it has not been stopped - and killing, torture and abduction continues.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The mining and trade of diamonds, alongside other natural resources in the DRC, have been causal factors in the armed conflict involving at least six foreign government armies and many armed political groups. A UN Panel of Experts, in its report of April 2001, said that "the conflict in the [DRC] has become mainly about access, control and trade of five key mineral resources: coltan, diamonds, copper, cobalt and gold." Amnesty International estimates that thousands, possibly tens of thousands, of unarmed civilians have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed by armed forces involved in the conflict since August 1998. As many as two million people, many of them living in and around mining areas, have been displaced

by armed forces; many have died from starvation, exposure and lack of treatment for diseases contracted while hiding from armed gunmen.

Liberia and Sierra Leone

Diamonds have been a key factor in fuelling the internal armed conflict in Sierra Leone. The rebel group Revolutionary United Front (RUF) has led a campaign of terror against civilians since 1991, including killings, torture and abduction. The RUF has controlled the diamond-producing areas of the country and used the profits from diamond sales to procure weapons and other military assistance.

The Sierra Leone government has already put in place a UN-approved certification system for diamond exports. However, controls are still needed within the country to track diamonds from the point they are mined.

The government of neighbouring Liberia has been consistently accused of breaking UN embargoes by trading in diamonds from RUF areas of Sierra Leone and by giving military assistance to the RUF. In Liberia itself, civilians also suffer human rights abuses by government forces and armed groups in the north of the country. Although very few diamonds come from Liberia, the government has been accused of using the profits from the diamond trade with the RUF to procure weapons

and military assistance which contribute to human rights abuses.

Diamond export controls from Liberia are needed to make sure that these do not contribute to human rights abuses in Liberia or Sierra Leone.

For further information about Amnesty International or any of the issues mentioned here, visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org> or write to the International Secretariat, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom (email: amnestyis@amnesty.org, fax: +44 207 956 1157)