

CONFLICT DIAMONDS

ISSUE

Names for conflict diamonds include “blood diamond,” “dirty diamond” or “war diamond.” The United Nations defines conflict diamonds as “diamonds that originate from areas controlled by forces of factions opposed to legitimate and internationally recognized governments and are used to fund military action in opposition to those governments or in contravention of the decisions of the Security Council.”

BACKGROUND

Conflict Diamonds began to receive attention during the conflict in Sierra Leone in the late 1990s. At the time it was estimated that 4% of the world’s diamond production came from diamonds funding conflicts. They were used by rebels in Angola, Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo. The diamonds were mined in war zones, smuggled out and then sold on the international market. The money gained from the international diamond market then funds rebels who are known such brutal tactics as mutilating innocent people, abducting women and the conscription of child soldiers. According to Amnesty USA 3.7 million lives have been lost as a result of blood diamonds.

Approximately \$8.4 billion worth of diamonds come from diamond producing countries in Africa, accounting for 65% of the world’s diamond production. This money, when it comes from legitimate forms of trade, can be used to fund projects within diamond producing countries to build infrastructure and improve standards of living. For example it is estimated that revenues from diamonds have given about 5 million people access to health care. Conflict diamonds therefore not only hurt people through the violence they fund but because they also take away revenue from positive, development generating programs.

The Beginnings of the Kimberly Process

In response to the increased awareness of blood diamonds, representatives from the diamond industry and NGOs met in Kimberly, South Africa in May of 2000. They began negotiations on an international diamond certification scheme. The Kimberly process resulted three years later. It was endorsed by the diamond industry, participating governments and NGOs in November of 2002 and launched in January 2003, with additional endorsements from the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.

The goal of the Kimberley Process is to prevent conflict diamonds from entering legitimate diamond trade. Countries that participate in the Kimberley Process must pass legislation to enforce regulatory measures and set up a system of controls in regard to the trade of rough diamonds. Participants can only trade rough diamonds with other participants. Each year participants meet to discuss the Kimberley Processes implementation and there are also working groups who monitor the process, assess applications to join and analyze various statistics.

The Kimberley Process Today

Overall the Kimberley Process has been hailed as a success. According to the World Diamond Council only 1% of the world’s diamond production is from conflict diamonds. The Kimberley Process now has

46 participants including the European Community. More countries are publishing statistics on their diamond trade, making it easier to spot smugglers.

Recently, there have been more breakthroughs in the fight against conflict diamonds. Venezuela has agreed to combat diamond smuggling and follow the Kimberley Process after having been accused of massive diamond smuggling. Ghana, which had been accused of smuggling illegal diamonds from Cote d'Ivoire, is no longer violating the Kimberley Process. Liberia, who had for a long time been involved in the trade of illicit diamonds, became a participant in the Kimberley Process on May 4, 2007. Cote d'Ivoire is the only diamond producing country today that is under United Nations diamond sanctions.

Despite the success of countries signing on to the Kimberley Process, there are still problems and reports of blood diamonds on both ends of the trade. For example, in Sierra Leone it is estimated that the illicit trade of conflict diamonds is still between 15 and 20%. A report from the United States government office that oversees implementation of the Clean Diamond Trade Act shows that major weaknesses in the certification process remain. It is possible that blood diamonds are entering the U.S. because government controls are not strong enough or enforced effectively. One percent of the international diamond trade is still suspected of being conflict diamonds, and for those who continue to suffer from the wars they fund, 1% is not good enough.

In order to improve the process and combat the still prevalent blood diamonds, it has been suggested that the Kimberley Process participants increase government oversight of the diamond industry, strengthen government controls, and increase transparency through the publication of statistics. Because the process is run by volunteers, it has also been recommended that it would be stronger with funding provided by member countries to support NGOs who work to effectively implement the process. Although the issue of conflict diamonds seems to be less vital than it was in the late 1990's, it is still important that these symbols of love not finance bloodshed and the destruction of lives.

EPISCOPAL CHURCH ACTIONS

In 2002, the Executive Council passed a resolution recognizing the role of conflict diamonds in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The resolution also recognized the Kimberly Process and urged its implementation by the United States.

In 2003, the Episcopal Church joined a coalition made up of religious and humanitarian organizations that commended the passing of The Clean Diamond Trade Act in the United States which was passed by Congress on April 11 2003 and signed into law by President Bush on April 25.

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_19266_ENG_HTM.htm

OTHER RESOURCES

- Executive Council Resolution http://www.episcopalchurch.org/1866_70061_ENG_HTM.htm
- www.diamondfacts.org
- <http://globalwitness.org>
- <http://www.kimberlyprocess.com>
- <http://www.amnestyusa.org>