

Diamonds:Valentine's Day 2002: for many people, diamonds do not symbolize love, but conflict, misery and poverty

"As people in many countries give diamonds to their loved ones on Valentine's Day (14 February), they still have no way of knowing where their diamond comes from or whether they have contributed to human rights abuses," Amnesty International said today.

In Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone, proceeds from the sale of diamonds have funded civil wars resulting in horrendous human rights abuses. "For many people in these countries, diamonds do not symbolize love, but war, misery and poverty."

"There is an imperative need for urgent implementation of transparent and effective controls on the international diamond trade to break the link between diamonds, arms transfers and human rights abuses," Amnesty International said today as part of an international coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The eight NGOs, including Amnesty International, have prepared a "Report Card" reviewing the efforts of the "Kimberley Process" to develop proposals for an international diamond certification system. The "Report Card" welcomes the progress made in some areas, but demonstrates that much more is needed to ensure that the agreed system is transparent and effective.

In March, governments will discuss the details of the certification system at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in New York and at a meeting of the "Kimberley Process" in Ottawa, Canada, with the aim of agreeing the certification system for implementation later this year.

Governments must not miss these key opportunities to agree on the certification system. Almost two years have passed since the "Kimberley Process" began, but too little progress has been made. All governments must agree to transparent and effective controls and these must be implemented without further delay to prevent further human rights abuses.

Furthermore, the system as currently proposed lacks enough provisions to make it transparent and effective: there is no agreement on the creation of a public international data base on the production and trade in rough diamonds; the provisions for monitoring are too weak; there has been no agreement on international coordination; and debate continues on whether the system will be compatible with World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations.

"If the system does not address these problems, it will fail to break the link between diamonds and human rights abuses," Amnesty International said.

Background information

The link between diamonds, arms transfers and human rights abuses in several armed conflicts has been known for more than three years. Many governments and the diamond industry have made efforts to control the diamond trade, including through the "Kimberley Process". The UN has imposed sanctions, banning the trade in diamonds and arms with the armed political groups União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, in Angola and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. UN sanctions have also been imposed on Liberia, whose government is accused of trading in diamonds with the RUF and giving them military assistance.

Amnesty International welcomes these steps, but is concerned that they do not go far enough to make a real difference to the lives of people in Angola, DRC and Sierra Leone. In these countries, the profits from the diamond trade are used to purchase weapons which contribute to human rights abuses.

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For further information on conflict diamonds visit:

<http://web.amnesty.org/diamonds/index.html>

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>