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Sierra Leone Diamonds: International certification system essential to help end killings, abduction and torture of civilians

Governments and the diamond industry must seize the opportunity next week to establish an effective and transparent international diamond certification system, Amnesty International said today. Those involved have a legal and moral responsibility to sever permanently the link between the diamond trade and killings, abduction and torture of civilians.

A meeting to be held in London, United Kingdom (UK), from 11 to 13 September, is the seventh meeting of the so-called Kimberley process which aims to develop proposals for an international diamond certification system before the 56th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in December 2001.

Amnesty International acknowledges that the diamond industry has passed resolutions and taken other steps seeking to prevent the trade in conflict diamonds. However, the industry has not been able to demonstrate that its self-regulatory mechanisms have been successful and governments involved in the Kimberley process have been unable to agree on precise terms for drafting legislation.

Measures taken by the industry must be backed by effective legislation in all relevant countries and an independently-verifiable and legally-binding certification system, Amnesty International urged. Action must be immediate and decisive. Further delays could mean that more unarmed civilians suffer human rights abuses.

Amnesty International sections around the world have given their support to a petition by a coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) campaigning against the trade in conflict diamonds. The petition calls for decisive action at the meeting this week, raising concerns that progress in the Kimberley process has been too slow. Many governments and key players in the diamond industry appear reluctant to commit themselves to a truly effective system with provisions for international monitoring.

The NGO petition stresses that: All countries involved in the production, movement and processing of rough diamonds *must* agree to minimum international standards, and these *must* be open to international scrutiny. Amnesty International strongly supports this recommendation. Any certification system must help to prevent arms transfers which could contribute to human rights abuses, the organization said. In order to achieve this, the system must include internationally-consistent monitoring of rough diamonds from the mine to the consumer.

Certification systems in countries producing, trading or importing diamonds must be consistent to allow for effective international monitoring and to prevent conflict diamonds from entering the flow of certified diamonds. The diamond trade should be monitored both from the

diamond mine to the point of export from the producing country and also from the producing country throughout the trading and manufacturing process in other countries.

The Kimberley process was initiated in part due to recognition by the international community of the link between the diamond trade and human rights abuses, in particular in the case of the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone.

An effective and transparent international system is essential to ensure the full implementation of UN Security Council measures to prevent the trade in diamonds from RUF-held areas of Sierra Leone. UN member states have an obligation to demonstrate that diamonds originating from these areas do not enter their territory, Amnesty International said.

Furthermore, the apparent absence of monitoring of diamond mining in Sierra Leone makes it impossible to guarantee that the RUF is not still benefiting from the diamond trade. This clearly demonstrates the need for monitoring of diamonds from the mine to the point of export, Amnesty International stressed.

Background

The RUF has been responsible for widespread and systematic human rights abuses against civilians throughout the ten-year internal armed conflict in Sierra Leone, using the profits from the diamond trade to obtain arms and other military assistance which contribute to human rights abuses.

Since July 2000, several steps have been taken to control the diamond trade in the region, including: the operation of government certification systems in Sierra Leone since October 2000 and in neighbouring Guinea since June 2001; a UN Security Council ban since May 2001 on all diamond exports from Liberia, due to evidence of the trade in arms and diamonds between the Liberian government and the RUF; an agreement in July 2001 between the Sierra Leone government, the RUF and the UN to a ban on diamond mining in the eastern Kono district; the recent deployment of UN peace-keeping troops in some diamond-producing areas under RUF control.

Despite all this, it is generally accepted that diamond mining is continuing in Kono district and other parts of Sierra Leone, including by the RUF. There are no effective controls in place to monitor the exact origin of a diamond or the identity of the person who has mined it.

In addition to preventing the diamond trade from RUF-held areas of Sierra Leone through Liberia, the international community must ensure that the diamond trade from Liberia does not contribute to human rights abuses against civilians in Liberia itself. Amnesty International has in recent months documented and publicised the alarming levels of widespread and gross abuses against unarmed civilians by both Liberian government forces and armed opposition groups.

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