

The Role of Diamonds in Fueling Armed Conflict.

Introduction

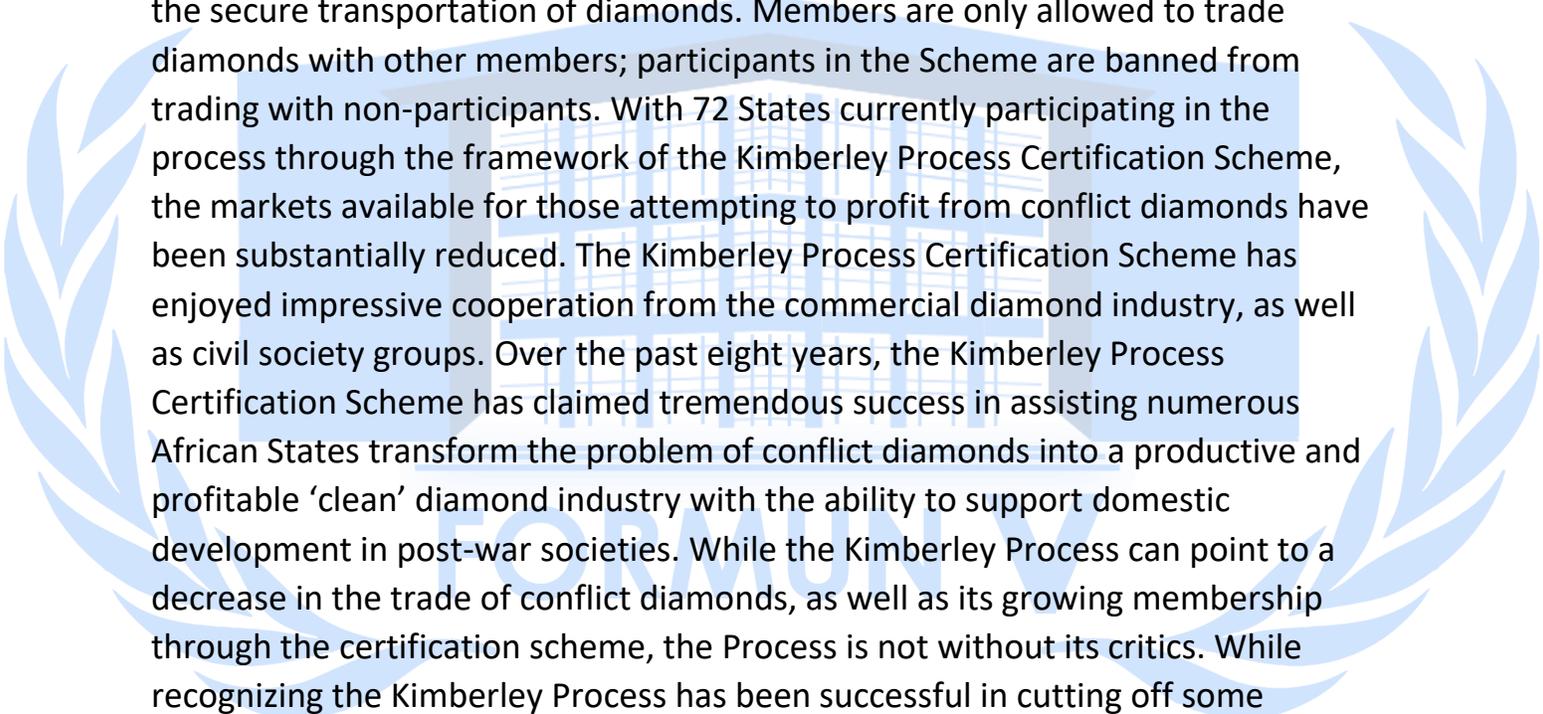
As early as 1998, the United Nations (UN) concerned itself with the problem of conflict diamonds and their role in financing armed conflict. They have been recognized by the UN as being a crucial factor in the prolonged and brutal civil wars, particularly in parts of Africa due to their ability to fund rebel groups. On December 1st, 2000, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted A/RES/55/56, which addressed the issue of conflict diamonds and called for Member States to implement previous United Nations Security Council (UNSC) measures to attack the link between conflict diamonds and the financing of armed conflicts involving rebel groups in the African conflicts. Despite the impressive efforts – and successes – of both domestic groups and the international community to combat the illicit trade in diamonds, they continue to play a significant role in fueling conflicts around the globe, particularly in Africa. Rebel groups that have prospered from conflict diamonds include the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. These groups have benefited financially from their participation in the trade of conflict diamonds and used these monies to finance their brutal campaigns on the African continent, which have taken an untold toll with respect to lives, economic opportunities and the possibility of peace.

On the one hand, the General Assembly Plenary deals with a subset of armed conflicts; specifically the civil conflicts within African countries identified by the United Nations as currently participating in the mining and sale of conflict diamonds. States currently identified by the international community as possibly participating in the trade of conflict diamonds include Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and the Republic of the Congo. States having previously been involved in the trade of conflict diamonds include Angola, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Today, it is suggested by the Kimberley Process organization and others that Côte d'Ivoire remains the only State wherein rebel groups still maintain control of diamond production, making up 0.2% of the world's diamond

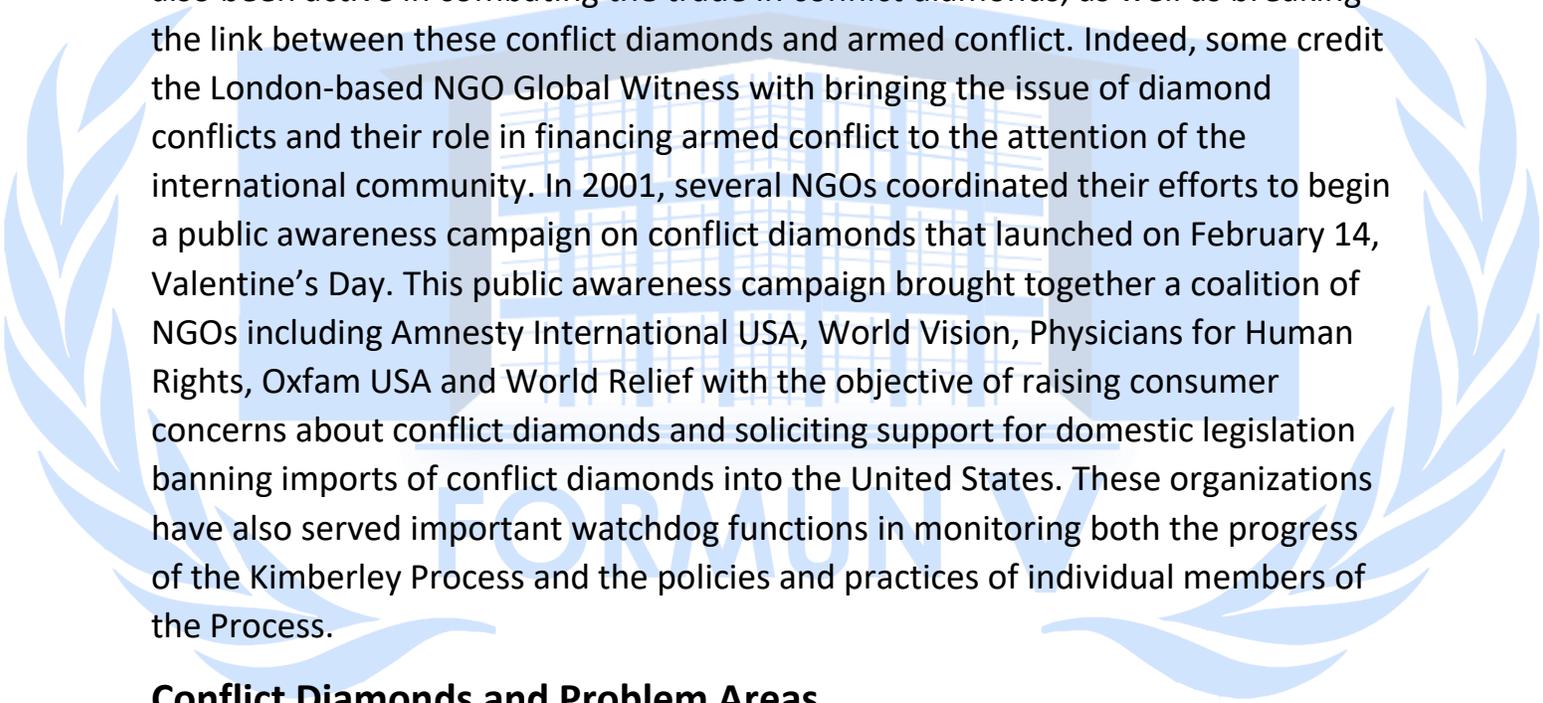
trade. This statistic provides solid evidence of the impressive accomplishment that the international community has achieved in breaking the link between rough diamonds and the financing of armed conflict. The General Assembly Plenary furthermore considers the link between conflict diamonds and armed violence taking the form of terrorism. The United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has reported links between Al Qaeda money laundering efforts and the conflict diamond trade in Africa; according to the FBI, Al Qaeda began buying diamonds from Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front at the time of the 1998 United States embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Such trade has resulted in millions of dollars being procured by terrorist groups; these funds are both procured illegally and used to conduct illegal – and usually violent – activities around the globe. The United Nations defines conflict diamonds – also known as 'blood diamonds' – as “diamonds that originate from areas controlled by forces or 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.” Both the General Assembly Plenary and the UNSC have given considerable time and attention to this issue over the past decade; their efforts have been assisted by the international community at large, including many of those involved in the production and sale of legitimate diamonds.

Previous Efforts in Combating the Trade in Conflict Diamonds

As discussed above, the United Nations first addressed the link between diamonds and armed conflict in 2000 with the adoption of General Assembly Resolution A/RES/55/56. This resolution called for further transparency in the diamond trade, as well as establishing specific guidelines with respect to the certification of rough diamonds. The resolution encouraged the introduction of national certification schemes for diamonds, while also supporting the work of the Kimberley Process. While the resolution served to call attention to the problem of conflict diamonds with respect to their role in fueling and financing many civil conflicts in Africa, the resolution itself did not establish specific mechanisms for combating the problem. Instead, this responsibility was taken on by the Kimberley Process, which has played a key role in breaking the link between diamonds and the financing of armed conflicts in the region. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme was developed between 1999 and 2002



through cooperation between Member States, the diamond industry, and various Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Kimberley Process document developed definitions pertaining to conflict diamonds and the diamond trade itself, and also developed a framework for cooperation between all parties to develop certification and transparency schemes in the trade of rough diamonds. The Kimberley Process aims to regulate the trade in rough diamonds while ensuring conflict diamonds are not accepted on the international market. States apply for membership to the Scheme and must meet the membership qualifications of the Scheme, which include implementing internal domestic controls, information sharing with other members of the Scheme, and ensuring the secure transportation of diamonds. Members are only allowed to trade diamonds with other members; participants in the Scheme are banned from trading with non-participants. With 72 States currently participating in the process through the framework of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, the markets available for those attempting to profit from conflict diamonds have been substantially reduced. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme has enjoyed impressive cooperation from the commercial diamond industry, as well as civil society groups. Over the past eight years, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme has claimed tremendous success in assisting numerous African States transform the problem of conflict diamonds into a productive and profitable 'clean' diamond industry with the ability to support domestic development in post-war societies. While the Kimberley Process can point to a decrease in the trade of conflict diamonds, as well as its growing membership through the certification scheme, the Process is not without its critics. While recognizing the Kimberley Process has been successful in cutting off some avenues of the conflict diamond trade, there have been critiques that the control mechanisms of the Scheme are not particularly effective, nor stringent enough. Some of the signatories of the Kimberley Process have been unwilling to agree to develop an international, independent monitoring of the certification process itself. "To become a member of the Kimberly Process, a country has to do little more than send a postcard by diplomatic post to the organization's president, South Africa." As such, there are very real concerns that current measures to block the trade of conflict diamonds are insufficient. It has been recommended that these controls be tightened and cooperation of Member States be increased. The World Federation of Diamond Bourses and the International Diamond



Manufacturers Association, working together as the World Diamond Council, is another organization that has found itself on the frontlines of the fight against conflict diamonds. In 2000, motivated by concerns over the violent consequences of African conflicts, the organization created the World Diamond Council. The Council was charged with the task of developing, implementing and overseeing a tracking system “for the export and import of rough diamonds to prevent the exploitation of diamonds for illicit purposes such as war and inhumane acts.” The World Diamond Council has also worked extensively with the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme organization in an effort to provide cooperation from those businesses involved in the diamond trade. Non-governmental organizations have also been active in combating the trade in conflict diamonds, as well as breaking the link between these conflict diamonds and armed conflict. Indeed, some credit the London-based NGO Global Witness with bringing the issue of diamond conflicts and their role in financing armed conflict to the attention of the international community. In 2001, several NGOs coordinated their efforts to begin a public awareness campaign on conflict diamonds that launched on February 14, Valentine’s Day. This public awareness campaign brought together a coalition of NGOs including Amnesty International USA, World Vision, Physicians for Human Rights, Oxfam USA and World Relief with the objective of raising consumer concerns about conflict diamonds and soliciting support for domestic legislation banning imports of conflict diamonds into the United States. These organizations have also served important watchdog functions in monitoring both the progress of the Kimberley Process and the policies and practices of individual members of the Process.

Conflict Diamonds and Problem Areas

It is difficult for the international community to identify exactly which States have groups involved in conflict diamonds and the status of a State’s diamond trade will be greatly impacted by its political stability. As stated above, States identified as having been involved in the conflict diamond trade include many African States, including Angola, Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, and Sudan. At time of press, only Côte d’Ivoire is characterized by the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme as having groups participating in the conflict diamond trade. However, this is not always a guarantee that the diamond trade in other States is entirely ‘clean,’ as the Kimberley Process can often be

circumvented by enterprising individuals, groups and even occasionally, States. It is important to note that conflict diamond trade tends to be a practice of rebel groups and not legitimate State actors as defined by the United Nations. As such, States suffering from civil strife are most likely to face the conflict diamond problem. States that are currently participants in the Kimberley Process include Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone. It should be noted that most States identified as having had or currently having rebel groups profiting from conflict diamonds are participants in the Kimberley Process, exposing the need to build on Kimberley Process and develop more powerful means of combating the conflict diamond trade. Ways in which to strengthen the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme should be considered by delegates in determining how to both prevent current trade in conflict diamonds, as well as prevent future rebel groups from adopting the practice.

Conflict Diamonds and Terrorism

Terrorism is a form of armed conflict, although it does differ significantly from traditional warfare. However, as many individuals and groups engaging in terrorism have profited from trade in conflict diamonds, it is important that this body considers the relationship between terrorism and conflict diamonds. As discussed above, the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has reported links between Al Qaeda money laundering efforts and the conflict diamond trade in Africa; according to the FBI, Al Qaeda began buying diamonds from Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front at the time of the 1998 United States embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Unfortunately, such trade has resulted in millions of dollars being procured by terrorist groups; these funds are both procured illegally and used to conduct illegal – and usually violent – activities around the globe. This development has allowed Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations to easily hide massive amounts of assets outside of financial intuitions; this has made it profoundly more difficult for the United Nations, States and other organizations to track terrorist resources, leaving the international community vulnerable to attack by such groups.

Conclusion

While conflict diamonds constitute a very small percentage of the diamond trade itself, they remain a very powerful tool of rebel groups, have the potential to

result in extreme violence, and rob States of valuable natural resources. In the wrong hands, diamonds have the potential to thwart peace attempts and fund activities ranging from conventional warfare to terrorism. To date, the efforts of the United Nations and the work of the UN-mandated Kimberley Process Certification Scheme have resulted in many States adopting policies of certification and practices of transparency which have thwarted the ability of rebel groups to profit from so-called 'blood diamonds.' It is impressive that the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme organization itself believes that less than two percent of diamonds on the world market are conflict diamonds and lists Côte d'Ivoire as the sole State wherein rebel groups remain in control of important diamond mines and resources. This, coupled with the extensive African membership in the Scheme, is strong evidence of the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme's successes. However, any instability in diamond-rich areas of the world increases the risk that diamonds – and the individuals who mine them – will be exploited. That exploitation has the potential to result in extreme violence while financing bloody civil wars and the activities of international terrorists. Thus, combating the entrance of conflict diamonds to the world market remains of utmost importance in both establishing regional peace and fighting the global war on terrorism. During the process of writing position papers and preparing for the conference itself, delegates are encouraged to give careful to the consideration to the work that has already been accomplished with respect to breaking the link between diamonds and armed conflict. It is important that the General Assembly Plenary moves forward with respect to this area and avoids duplication of previous efforts. Additionally, it is important to consider to what degree previous mechanisms have been successful in curbing the conflict diamond trade. What weaknesses exist in previously developed mechanisms? What can be done to optimize and reform the existing processes? What areas have been successfully addressed and what contributed to their successes? Delegates should remain mindful of the immense economic power of diamonds and the role companies dealing in diamonds will play in breaking the link between violent conflict and diamonds. How can the United Nations work with these businesses to guarantee trading in conflict diamonds is not profitable or beneficial? What are some of the greatest roadblocks to ensuring that the percentage of 'clean' diamonds on the international market reaches 100? Which incentives could be developed to further regular diamond trade, including

creating a positive impact for development? Delegates should also consider allegations that transnational groups, specifically terror networks active in the Middle East and North African region are exploiting 'dirty' diamonds to fund their activities. What can the body do to prevent future exploitation in this area?

