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DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL  
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# TOPIC 1: BLOOD DIAMONDS IN WEST AFRICA

## What is a blood diamond?

The term blood diamond, refers to a type of conflict diamond that is sold in order to finance numerous violent actions, such as terrorism or political coups. Though the marketing of blood diamond is a global issue, the problem is most severe in Africa, such as the following countries: Liberia, Angola, and Sierra Leone. Both international organizations, such as the United Nations, and the governments of neighboring countries have worked diligently to ratify and enact resolutions to help combat the blood diamond trade.

The main problem with blood diamonds involves the detection of legitimacy of these diamonds. When blood diamonds are mined in parts of Africa, they are immediately sold off to organized rebels, who then resell or trade these diamonds for a large sum of money in order to gain access to weapons. Such secretive transactions contribute to the difficulty in unearthing blood diamond operations. These rebel organizations use the illegal obtained munitions to carry out assassination orders and government coups, thus attributing blood diamonds their name.

Smuggling blood diamonds has cost millions of lives in Africa. Children and other mine workers are often forced to extract these diamonds from dangerous conditions in order to support their families. Moreover, the majority of these workers are being blackmailed by individuals to mine diamonds for illegal purposes lest those threats against their families be fulfilled. As a result, these blood diamonds fuel the violent civil wars in which innocent bystanders become the victims of a cruel operation.

## Past/Recent UN Resolutions

Though Africa and numerous other nations are plagued by the sale of blood diamonds, the United Nations has taken the initiative to stop the sale of blood diamonds. On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000, the United Nations General Assembly initiated the Kimberly Process Resolution. This resolution was a scheme to prevent the spread of blood diamonds onto mainstream diamond markets. By implementing strict requirements on the source of an unknown diamond, the resolution hoped to “break the link between the illicit transaction of rough diamonds and armed conflict, as a contribution to prevention and settlement of conflicts.”<sup>1</sup> The Kimberly Process Certification Scheme was essentially a strong suggestion for companies to keep a detailed paper trail that certifies the origin of any diamond. This aims to cut off the flow of blood diamonds.

However, one major setback of this resolution is that participation is voluntary. Thus, governments and other diamond companies do not violate any international laws when they fail to uphold the principles of this Kimberly Process Certification Scheme. Most companies are unwilling to cooperate because they feel that they are divulging unnecessary resources and creating needless financial burdens on themselves towards a barely effective cause.

## History of the Issue

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<sup>1</sup> [www.kimberleyprocess.com/download/getfile/703](http://www.kimberleyprocess.com/download/getfile/703)

### *Sierra Leone*

Sierra Leone has suffered the one of the most damaging effects of blood diamonds. During the civil war period in Sierra Leone, “rebels were frequently able to trade diamonds for weapons from the very government commanders and soldiers who were supposed to be fighting them.”<sup>2</sup> Even recently, rebel organizations are still heavily relying on blood diamond sales to finance their operations.

For example, the rebel group Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched assaults against the government in Sierra Leone. The RUF usurped control of numerous diamond mines in Sierra Leone. Thus rebel group enslaved civilians to work in the diamond mines. Not only did these prisoners suffer extremely hazardous working conditions, but also they would be brutally punished for the slightest mishaps. Members of the RUF demonstrated their power and instilled fear in the workers by publically amputating the limbs of any dissenting worker, setting an example for the rest of miners.

Through smuggling blood diamonds, the RUF earned hundreds of millions of dollars and used this money to supply themselves with a variety of weapons. However, despite these illicit proceedings, the actions of the RUF were ignored because the profit that the rebel group accumulated was used as hush money and bribes for corrupt government officials. Tens of thousands of people were murdered because of the sale of these conflict diamonds by the RUF had been condoned by the government.

Even though the United Nations has initiated sanctions to curb such illegal activities in

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/vol20no4/ar-20no4-english-web.pdf>

Sierra Leone, the certificates that are part of the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme can still easily be forged. Blood diamonds mined in Sierra Leone can easily be smuggled into a "clean" country. As a result, there would be no way of knowing the true origin of a supply of diamonds. There will always be more-than-willing countries that would help smuggle blood diamonds into the markets. Traders and buyers do not bother to always ask questions about the source of such precious diamond. They are happy to sell off diamonds so they can line their pockets with money. Furthermore, especially in Sierra Leone, which is a country rife with suffering and poverty, there are a myriad of officials who would be willing to accept bribes and overlook smuggling operations.

### *Angola*

Diamond mining in Angola dates back to 1913. It remains a major source of economy in Angola. During the civil war, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) seized various diamond mines and used blood diamond sales to fund their fight against the Angola's Marxist regime, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

In 1999, the Society of Diamond Commercialization of Angola (SODIAM) was established by the government to create a single market for Angola's raw diamond production. In response to this diamond company, the United Nations Security Council established an Independent Panel of Experts, placing sanctions on Angola so that they could not receive weapons; the UN hoped that smuggling groups would not be able to trade in blood diamonds for arms if there were no weapons in Angola to begin with. The Panel suggested a “Monitoring Mechanism” that gathered information on any infringement of the sanctions.

However, these attempts are not very effective. Again, corrupt officials look the other way when offered enough money to let a shipment of blood diamonds pass to another country. Even in the inspections of law abiding officials, blood diamonds are rarely discovered because they have been mixed with other legitimate diamonds. In order to completely halt the sales of blood diamonds in Angola, the Monitoring Mechanism, for one, needs to be improved for maximum effectiveness.

### *Liberia*

When speaking about blood diamonds, Liberia has always been mentioned in tandem with Sierra Leone. Liberia because its proximity to Sierra Leone is known as the “pipeline” for Sierra Leone’s blood diamonds. Liberia’s Mano River Basin is a hotspot for rebel groups. This area of Liberia was rich in diamond mines, and rebel groups often seized control of these mines to fund their own operations. Liberia tried to impede the sales of blood diamonds by creating the Mano River Union with Sierra Leone with some success.

However, today following the civil wars in Liberia, many of the rebel groups relocated their blood diamond smuggling operations to “alluvial diamond-bearing rocks and gravels located in drainage basins, or along the banks of Liberia's many rivers and tributaries.”<sup>3</sup> Because of the secrecy involved in these operations, local officials have been unable to find or catch these rebel groups in the act.

### *United States*

The United States has helped try and stop the sales of blood diamonds by issuing Executive Orders prohibiting the purchase of any diamonds from either Sierra Leone or

Liberia. The U.S. also issued the Clean Diamond Trade Act (CDTA) in April 2003. This act effectively detailed the United State’s cooperation in ridding the world from the violence that came with blood diamonds. This legislation strongly acknowledged the significance of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. Currently, there has been an increasingly heightened concern over blood diamonds because several reports suspect that major terrorist groups, such as Al-Queda, are being financed by blood diamond sales.

### *Canada*

Canada created the Partnership Africa Canada in 1986 to help to mitigate the crisis in Africa. This program is part of the Diamond Development Initiative that regulates legal diamond industry. As a strong supporter of the KPCS, the Canadian government passed the Export and Import of Rough Diamonds Act in 2002 that helped stop the trade of conflict diamonds through Canada. The Act indicates that a Canadian Certificate is required for all shipments of diamonds.

### *European Union*

The European Commission represents the EU as chair of the KPCS in 2007. Europe is the biggest diamond-trading centre in the world, so plays a key role in the KP. The EU also implemented the Council Regulation 2368/2002.

### *Asia*

There have been reports of conflict diamonds being smuggled into Surat, India. Surat is the world’s centre for cutting diamonds. Indian Intelligence Officers say that the diamonds will have to be identified before entering India.

## **Relevant Links**

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.allaboutgemstones.com/conflict-diamonds\\_liberia.html](http://www.allaboutgemstones.com/conflict-diamonds_liberia.html)

UN – Conflict Diamonds

<http://www.un.org/peace/africa/Diamond.html>

World Diamond Council – Conflict Diamonds

<http://www.diamondfacts.org/conflict/index.html>

Global Witness – Combating Conflict Diamonds

[http://www.globalwitness.org/pages/en/conflict\\_diamonds.html](http://www.globalwitness.org/pages/en/conflict_diamonds.html)

Kimberley Process Certification Scheme

<http://www.kimberleyprocess.com/>

Blood Diamonds in Asia

[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/IK14Df01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/IK14Df01.html)

\*And guys, if you have some free time on your hands, be sure to check out the movie *Blood Diamond* starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Djimon Hounsou. The movie is fairly accurate in its depiction of underage soldiers and brutality against diamond mine workers.