



Blood diamonds / Time to plug the leaks / Civil Society Groups warn Kimberley Process effectiveness compromised

OTTAWA, Canada, June 20, 2009/ABC Television-Africa (ABC)/ — A landmark scheme established in 2003 to prevent trade in conflict diamonds is

potentially failing in its objectives, campaigners said today.

Ahead of a key meeting of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) in Namibia, a coalition of civil society groups said that despite having all the tools in place, the scheme was failing to address effectively issues of non-compliance, smuggling, money laundering and human rights abuses in the world's alluvial diamond fields. The groups highlighted a number of countries where there were issues of concern:

In Zimbabwe there is clear evidence of government-led human rights abuse in diamond mining areas, as well as smuggling and weak internal controls;

Lebanon is exporting significantly more gem-quality rough diamonds than it imports. The problem has been known for months, but the KP has been sluggish in its response;

Over the past two years there has been an astonishing 500% increase in diamond exports from Guinea, a country whose current government has acknowledged widespread corruption in the mining industry. A KP review team visited Guinea in August 2008 but a year later its report has still not been completed, suggesting critical problems in the KP monitoring system;

Venezuela agreed in 2008 that it would suspend its diamond trade until new control systems could be established. A civil society investigative visit to Venezuela in May 2009 found that diamonds are still being mined and smuggled into the world's legitimate trade with complete impunity.

Annie Dunnebacke from Global Witness, said: "The clock is running out on Kimberley Process credibility. The work it was set up to do is vital – it would be scandalous if uncooperative governments and industry succeeded in hobbling it into ineffectiveness".

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The civil society groups are repeating calls for action in the following areas:

Human Rights: Civil society organisations propose that the following words be added to the preamble of the main KPCS document: The Kimberley Process shall promote respect for human rights as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and shall require their effective recognition and observance in the diamond industries of participating countries, and among the peoples, institutions and territories under their jurisdiction.

Monitoring: The Kimberley Process must significantly improve its monitoring function. Its forthcoming review of Zimbabwe must be thorough, and must provide clear direction where problems are identified. Ongoing problems in Venezuela, Guinea and Lebanon must be addressed and solved as a matter of urgency.

Cutting and Polishing Centres: The KP has long ignored a significant loophole in its control procedures. Civil society organizations call yet again for the KP to ensure that statistics regarding the purchase, use and sale of rough diamonds by cutting and polishing centres are incorporated into its internal control mechanism and reconciled in such a way that rough diamonds do not bypass other internal control measures.

Alfred Brownell from Green Advocates, Liberia, said: “Namibia was a founding member of the Kimberley Process and as current Chair of the scheme should be a leader in ensuring an effective and efficient diamond certification system. The Kimberley Process must be a force for development in Africa’s diamond-rich nations and take a clear stand against human rights abuses.”

Susanne Emond from Partnership Africa Canada, said: “The Kimberley Process must fulfill its potential to ensure a clean diamond trade. We are calling on the diamond industry to join with us in demanding that governments enforce the scheme’s rules with greater commitment and timeliness.”

In Sierra Leone, blood diamonds were among the major causes of the violent rebel war against the civilian population in which, over 50,000 lives were lost and more than 500,000 civilians displaced from their communities. Sierra Leone is a participant in the Kimberly Process but majorities of the diamonds are smuggled out of the country to the diamond capital of the world – Antwerp, Belgium through Liberia and Guinea, thereby, circumventing the certification process. The government of Belgium so far has been reluctant in enforcing the certification process and cracking down on the violators. According to a unanimous source in Sierra Leone, there is no incentive for the government of Belgium to crackdown on KP violators because the diamond trade benefits their country’s economy while Sierra Leone children die from hunger and malnutrition and the youths die in mining pits each day.