



## MOVIE SPARKS DEBATE OVER DIAMOND TRADE

*The movie "Blood Diamond," which premieres this month, is putting the media spotlight on conflict diamonds and has the diamond industry worried about negative fallout.*

Conflict diamonds, sometimes referred to as blood diamonds, are gems that are illegally sold to fund civil wars and rebel conflicts. Billions of dollars worth of profit has been used to buy arms for civil wars in African countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone.

"Blood Diamond," starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Djimon Hounsou, is set in Sierra Leone in the 1990s, when rebels took control and profited from the country's vast diamond mines. The movie includes graphic images of violence, child soldiers and victims of rebel mutilation.

The war in Sierra Leone ended in 2002, but human rights groups say the problem of diamond-funded conflicts persists in other African countries, such as Liberia and Cote D'Ivoire. Two such groups, Amnesty International and Global Witness, have partnered with the movie to raise awareness on the issue.

"This is a Trojan horse message, because people will walk out of this movie and not view diamonds the same way," said Amnesty International's director of Artists for Amnesty, Bonnie Abaunza.

### **Defending diamonds**

Concern in the diamond industry over a potential backlash from the film has been building for more than a year.

"Can you imagine its impact on the Christmas-buying audience in America if the message is not carried through that this is something of the past?" Jonathan Oppenheimer, a director of the world's largest supplier of rough diamonds, De Beers, said at a trade convention in South Africa last fall.

The United States purchases about 65 percent of the world's diamonds, and 60 percent of the world's diamonds originate in Africa.

Earlier this year, the industry group the World Diamond Council (WDC) launched a multimillion-dollar public relations campaign in anticipation of the movie's release. The group has taken out full-page ads in major newspapers and launched a Web site describing strides taken to reduce the impact of conflict diamonds, as well as the economic benefits of the diamond trade to African countries.

The WDC also appealed to the movie's director, Edward Zwick, asking him to add information to the movie on changes in the industry, in particular a regulation system called the Kimberley Process.

Zwick refused and has said he welcomes the opportunity for the movie to raise questions among consumers.

"What I wanted to create in their minds is consciousness," Zwick told National Public Radio. "A purchase of a diamond just has to be an informed purchase."

### **A problem of the past?**

The Kimberley Process, put in place in 2003, requires diamond shipments to be accompanied by certificates stating they were not mined in countries at war.

Before the Kimberley Process, the diamond industry estimated conflict diamonds made up 4 percent of the global trade, while nonprofit groups, such as Partnership Canada Africa, estimated the total at around 15 percent. The industry claims the Kimberley Process has curtailed the trade to less than 1 percent.

While everyone involved agrees the Kimberley Process is a step in the right direction, problems arise in measuring its success, in part, because of diamond smuggling.

A panel of United Nations experts reported in October that a significant number of diamonds are smuggled each year from the war-torn country of Cote D'Ivoire into Ghana, where they are certified as legitimate.

Tom Zoellner, a journalist and the author of a book on the diamond industry, says the Kimberley Process has not really affected how diamonds are smuggled across national borders. "It is a really superficial process," he said.

The Central African Republic mines can produce only about half the quantity of diamonds that are listed as originating from the country, Zoellner said in his book. Imbalances like this indicate holes in the process.

WDC spokesman Carson Glover agrees smuggling is still a problem. "Diamonds are the most portable commodity in the world, and smuggling is one of the oldest professions in the world," Glover said. "[The Kimberley Process] was not intended to stop smuggling."

### **Consumer response**

Jewelry stores are bracing for the film's opening to see whether the power of its political statement is matched by commercial success.

Other films released this year that made political statements, including "Thank You for Smoking," which skewered the cigarette industry, and "Fast Food Nation," which painted an unflattering picture of the fast-food industry, did not perform as well as expected.

-- By Talea Miller, *NewsHour Extra*

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