

Conflict Diamonds

Krista, ON

Diamonds have been recognized for centuries as symbols of beauty and purity, and have earned the title "A girl's best friend." However, as Olara Otunnu mentioned at his dinner with youth on September 14, there is a darker side to these gemstones as well. Less people are aware of this, but these stones have resulted in immense devastation across Africa. Conflict diamonds, also known as blood diamonds, are diamonds that originate from areas where they are under the control of a group fighting the legitimate government of that country. Such is the case in countries such as Sierra Leone, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rebel armies sell the diamonds for food and arms for their troops, and the trade is very profitable. In Sierra Leone, the diamonds sold by the rebel army have financed the killing, displacement and mutilation of millions of people. Similar acts of cruelty have taken place in Angola and Congo, also by armies supported by conflict diamonds. During the first war in Angola, the leader of the UNITA rebel organization gained \$4 billion, some of which was used to finance another war. Only an approximate 4% of diamonds originate from areas of war, but this percentage represents an incredibly lucrative business for those in control.

While the international community can limit the purchase of diamonds from the country in conflict, it is difficult to stop the smuggling of blood diamonds to neighbouring countries where

they are traded as having come from that country. Diamonds all have Certificates of Origin stating where they come from, and according to international agreements, a rough diamond should have the same Certificate of Origin regardless of how often it is traded before becoming a polished stone. Diamonds from areas of conflict are given incorrect Certificates of Origin.

Progress has been made in halting the illegal diamond trade. A method of diamond "fingerprinting" is being developed in Canada that can identify the diamond's precise origin. This will make it more difficult for smuggled diamonds to go unnoticed. De Beers, the company that controls about 70% of the world diamond market, has said it will guarantee that none of its diamonds come from war zones.

While the issue of conflict diamonds has recently been gaining more recognition internationally, there is still much to be done in stopping the problem and in halting the trade of these stones. People must be aware of what is happening and they must consider potential diamond purchases much more carefully. Action can be taken by spreading awareness of the problem so diamond buyers can make the right decisions and properly research the stone they are buying. Letters can be written to companies selling diamonds to pressure them to ensure that the diamonds do not originate from conflict situations.

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing; the Iraq Sanctions

Natalie, MB



Sanctions. The very word makes most of the delegates at the International Conference on War-Affected Children cringe. "When sanctions were imposed on my country (Iraq), we had no paper, no pens. All the doctors left because there was no medicine and they weren't getting paid," says Ewar, a 17-year-old teenager from Iraq who now lives in Canada. "There are better ways of doing things, sanctions aren't fair".

What is the Canadian government doing to stop the impact of sanctions on people? Not enough say many. "Sanctions shouldn't even be legal. With them, you hurt your own people instead of helping them; it becomes a vicious cycle" said one delegate. "The government should influence Saddam Hussein through other methods".

On September 13, 2000 a protest opposing the sanctions on Iraq was organised outside Fort Garry Hotel, where meetings for the International Conference were taking place. Many youth delegates wished to join them to show their support for the protest.

It is clear that sanctions are a very controversial issue. Fortunately, economic sanctions are one of the issues being discussed here this week. Many youth believe they are wrong, but at least at this conference they have opportunities to try to make changes by voicing their opinions. Other actions can also be taken to stop sanctions and prevent their long lasting effects. And maybe one day the gentle looking wolf that is attacking Iraq will give way to a nation of fairness and peace.