

It's a far cry from the clean, mechanized mines of South Africa, but it's how much of Africa's gem stones are mined: men dig by hand in **pits, gravel** and stream beds, looking for telltale signs of that **elusive** stone that will make them rich - or at least bring in enough money to **sustain** them and maybe secure the family's future.

Over one million diggers search for diamonds this way in Africa. They make less than a dollar a day, while the global diamond trade **nets** an estimated \$80 billion a year. But, economic **woes** are not the only human **toll** of the gem industry.

In countries like Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone, diamonds were used by armed militias and rebels to **fan** civil war and **inflict misery** on the population. These became known as "blood diamonds." Global Witness was one of the first non-governmental organizations to focus on the issue. Speaking with VOA in London, Annie Dunnebacke says the group set out to document the tragedy of conflict diamonds.

"Sierra Leone is one of the most **notorious** cases where hundreds of thousands of people died as a result of the conflict that saw the eastern part of the country, where the diamond fields are, controlled by the Revolutionary United Front, a rebel group backed by then Liberian president Charles Taylor," says Dunnebacke. "**Horrific** destruction and **havoc** was **wreaked**, especially upon the civilian population really, because the diamonds represented an economic **incentive** for the war to continue."

The horrors of that war shocked the public, especially the scenes of innocent men, women and children with their **limbs** cut off by rebels, and youngsters being forced into combat. Efforts to publicize the link between the **atrocities**, the **warlords** and the diamonds **paid off**.

The movie *Blood Diamonds* helped. In it, Leonardo DiCaprio plays an ex-**mercenary** who sells arms to Sierra Leone rebels in exchange for diamonds. In the end, though, he gives up the business and helps publicize the **illicit trade**.

Global Witness was an advisor on the film, and Annie Dunnebacke says it had an impact. "I think bringing the message in sort of Hollywood terms to a much wider audience than possibly our reports get to, it does have value," she says.

Eventually, international pressure made the diamond industry sit up and listen. In 2003, the Kimberley Process came into being. It **requires** member governments to **certify** that exports and imports are free from blood diamonds. Industry associations said they would **comply**.

Tom Tweedy is a spokesman for DeBeers, the world's largest producer of **rough diamonds**. He says the Kimberley Process is a good way forward. "We have a system, and however imperfect it may be, it is probably the only **comprehensive** system of its type in the world," says Tweedy.

At the World Diamond Center in Antwerp, Director Philip Claes says that before the Kimberley Process, conflict diamonds **accounted** for 4 to 15 percent of **rough diamonds** traded worldwide. "Today, conflict diamonds **account** for only 0.2 percent of all **rough diamonds** traded worldwide," says Claes.

The emphasis is on **certifying** the origin of the diamonds to **weed out** goods traded illegally. Annie Dunnebacke of Global Witness says it's a good start but there are **loopholes**.



The movie "Blood Diamond" helped audiences realize the implications behind the diamond trade

"There are huge weaknesses ranging obviously from **porous** borders in African **artisanal** producing countries and basic **lack** of infrastructure, corruption, things like this which are stopping the **scheme** from being **implemented** effectively, things that **encourage** a lot of smuggling, cross-border smuggling," she says.

In Johannesburg, diamond trader Janine Chaveau agrees. "I know quite a few people who are multi-millionaires who have never dealt in legal diamonds," she says, "it's always been illegal, blood diamonds."

Chaveau says she has been offered many undocumented diamonds. She says if they don't have papers, she doesn't touch them.

But, it's not just diamonds that are causing trouble. More than 90 percent of the world's **rubies** come from Burma, a poor country with a military government that controls the sale of **gems**. The trade helps **maintain** the government in power. Human rights activists are working to **tighten** sanctions against Burmese rubies.

But, like with diamonds, the **potential** profits are large and many are willing to look the other way.

Rights activists are hoping consumers will start to ask more questions of the jewelers to make sure that the gem stone they buy is not **sullied** by **anguish** and blood.



"Porous borders" in Africa encourage a lot of cross-border smuggling

WORDS

- **account for** = to have a share of
- **anguish** = suffering, pain
- **artisanal** = to dig for diamonds with your hands and not with the help of machines
- **atrocities** = cruel crimes and killings
- **certify** = declare officially
- **comply** = obey
- **comprehensive** = complete
- **elusive** = hard to get, mysterious
- **encourage** = push, promote
- **fan** = generate, to stir up, provoke
- **gem** = very valuable jewel or rock
- **gravel** = small stones, used to make roads
- **havoc** = chaos, destruction, disaster
- **horrific** = terrible, awful
- **illicit trade** = buying and selling of illegal products
- **implement** = put into effect
- **incentive** = motivation, reason for
- **inflict** = cause
- **lack** = not enough
- **limb** = arms and legs
- **loophole** = a small mistake in the law ; a way to get out of a situation

- **maintain** = keep
- **mercenary** = a soldier who will fight for any country or group that pays him
- **misery** = unhappiness, suffering
- **net** = to make a profit
- **notorious** = well known, but in a negative way
- **pay off** = to be successful
- **pit** = hole in the ground
- **porous** = with holes
- **potential** = possible
- **require** = to make necessary
- **rough diamonds** = diamonds that have not yet been cut or polished by industry
- **ruby** = a red jewel
- **scheme** = plan
- **sully** = dishonor
- **sustain** = to keep going, keep them alive
- **tighten** = to make tighter, stricter
- **toll** = a bad effect that something has
- **warlord** = boss of a rebel group
- **weed out** = sort out
- **woe** = misery, sadness
- **wreak** = do, inflict

