

## TESTIMONY

### HEARING STATEMENT CONFLICT DIAMOND TRADE U.S. SENATOR MIKE DEWINE FEBRUARY 11, 2002

Chairman Durbin -- thank you for inviting me to testify at this very important and very timely hearing today. As terrorism and conflict continue around the world, it is critical that we review the role our federal government can play in mitigating these challenges. We also need to look at how we may unknowingly finance conflicts and terrorism and work together to cut such financial ties.

This is why it is vital that we consider the role U.S. agencies play in fighting the conflict diamond trade. As you know, Chairman Durbin, the diamond trade is one of the world's most lucrative industries. With its potential for extreme profitability, it is not surprising that a black-market trade has emerged alongside the legitimate industry.

It is also not surprising that diamond trading has become an attractive and sustainable income source for violent rebel groups and terrorist networks around the world.

As you and I have discussed before, the sale of illicit diamonds has yielded disturbing reports in the media, linking even Osama bin Laden to this trade. The February 22, 2001 U.S. District Court trial, *United States vs. Osama bin Laden* attests to this. Additionally, there is an established link between Sierra Leone's diamond trade and well known Lebanese terrorists.

Currently in Africa, where the majority of the world's diamonds are found, there is on-going strife and struggle resulting from the fight for control of the precious gems. While violence has erupted in several countries, including Sierra Leone, Angola, the Congo, and Liberia, Sierra Leone -- in particular -- has one of the worst records of violence. In this nation, rebel groups -- most notably, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)-- have seized control of many of the country's diamond fields. Once in control of a diamond field, the rebels confiscate the diamonds; then, launder them onto the legitimate market through other nearby nations, like Liberia; and, ultimately finance their terrorist regimes and their continued efforts to overthrow the legitimate government. Over the past decade, the rebels reaped the the benefits of at least \$10 billion dollars in smuggled diamonds.

Since the start of the rebel quest for control of Sierra Leone's diamond supply, the children of this small nation have borne the brunt of the insurgency. For over eight years, the RUF has conscripted children -- children often as young as seven or eight years old -- to be soldiers in their make-shift army. They have ripped an estimated 12,000 children from their families. After the RUF invaded the capital of Freetown in January 1999, at least 3,000 children were reported missing.

As a result of deliberate and systematic brutalization, child soldiers have become some of the most vicious -- and effective -- fighters within the rebel factions. The rebel army -- child-soldiers included -- has terrorized Sierra Leone's population, killing, abducting, raping, and hacking off the limbs of victims with their machetes. This chopping off of limbs is the RUF's trademark strategy.

I cannot overstate, nor can I fully describe the horrific abuses these children are suffering. Rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual abuse of girls and women have been systematic, organized, and widespread. The most vivid accounts come from the child-soldiers, themselves.

I'd like to read one of their stories, taken from Amnesty International's 1998 report called, "Sierra Leone -- A Year of Atrocities against Civilians." According to one child's recollection:

"Civilians were rounded up, in groups or in lines, and then taken individually to a pounding block in the village where their hands, arms, or legs were cut with a machete.... Men were then ordered to rape members of their own family. If they refused, their arms were cut off and the women were raped by rebel forces, often in front of their husbands...victims of these atrocities also reported women and children being rounded up and locked into houses which were then set [on fire]."

Mr. Chairman, we are losing these children -- an entire generation of children. If the situation does not improve, these kids have no future. But, as long as the rebels' diamond trade remains unchallenged, nothing will change.

We can do something about this. We can make a difference. We have the power to help put an end to the indescribable suffering and violence in Sierra Leone and elsewhere in Africa.

As the world's biggest diamond customer -- purchasing the majority of the world's diamonds -- the United States has tremendous clout. With that clout, we have the power to remove the lucrative financial incentives that drive the rebel groups to trade in diamonds in the first place. Simply put, if there is no market for their diamonds, there is little reason for the rebels to engage in their brutal campaigns to secure and protect their cache.

That is why I will continue to work with you, Senator Gregg, and Senator Feingold on strong legislation which would remove the rebels' market incentive. We need to work together with the international community to facilitate the implementation of a system of controls on the export and import of diamonds, so that buyers can be certain that their purchases are not fueling the rebel campaign. It is irresponsible for us to do any less.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to take a moment and thank my colleague from Ohio, Congressman Tony Hall, and Congressman Frank Wolf from Virginia for the tireless efforts they have made to fight the conflict diamond trade. They both wanted to be here today, though their schedules would not permit it.

In their absence, I would like to submit a joint statement from our House colleagues and ask that it be included in today's hearing record. Congressman Hall announced yesterday that he has agreed to be our next U.S. Ambassador to the UN's food and agriculture agencies. Though he will be greatly missed in Congress, I am confident that he will continue his commitment to humanitarian initiatives and helping those suffering from hunger and human rights abuses around the world.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing today. We have an obligation -- a moral responsibility -- to help stop the violence, the brutality, the needless killing and maiming. No other child should kill or be killed in Sierra Leone or other

African nations. It is the humane thing to do. It is the right thing to do.

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