

TESTIMONY

Statement of Senator Russell D. Feingold
Hearing of the Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
Restructuring and the District of Columbia
“Illicit Diamonds, Conflict and Terrorism: The Role of US Agencies in Fighting the
Conflict Diamond Trade”
February 13, 2002

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I want to thank you for inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee today, and to thank you for all of your efforts to push for serious, viable mechanisms to disrupt the global trade in conflict diamonds. I am so pleased to have been able to work with you and with Senators De Wine and Gregg on this issue over the past year, and I very much hope that we can continue to work together to pass the best possible bill in the months ahead. And of course, without the leadership of Congressmen Tony Hall and Frank Wolf, this issue would likely have languished in obscurity for far too long.

Mr. Chairman, the first time that you and Senator DeWine and I came together to discuss this issue was last June, when we joined to introduce a bill that had the support of both the advocacy community and the diamond industry. As I noted then, as the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s Subcommittee on African Affairs, I have had the opportunity to travel to Angola, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to Sierra Leone. I have witnessed the devastation brought by conflicts fueled in large part by a desire for profit, and I have heard from people who believe their countries’ resources to be a curse.

But at the same time, over the years that I have served on the Africa Subcommittee, I have also worked on issues relating to countries like South Africa and Botswana. These states depend upon their legitimate diamond industries to fuel economic growth and development, and their interests deserve protection.

I believed then, as I believe now, that our national values and national interests demand that the United States disassociate itself from the trade in conflict diamonds, and that the U.S. must work with the rest of the international community to regulate the diamond trade and create a “clean stream” for the legitimate diamond industry and consumers to rely upon.

In the months since that press conference, my sense of urgency about this issue has only grown. Press reports have raised serious questions about connections between international terrorists and the illicit diamond trade, and this should come as no surprise.

In the Foreign Relations Committee, the Subcommittee on African Affairs has embarked on a series of hearings to be conducted over the course of the year, prompted by the current campaign against terrorism. In the wake of the attacks of September 11, the President was right to make plain that the US will not distinguish between the terrorists behind the attacks and those who harbor them.

But state sponsors are only part of the problem. The absence of a functioning state is another. So the Subcommittee hearings will examine the characteristics of some of Africa’s weakest states --- manifestations of lawlessness such as piracy, illicit air transport networks, and trafficking in arms, drugs, diamonds and other gemstones, and people --- that can make the region attractive to terrorists and other international criminals.

Our subcommittee is trying to identify long-term policy options for changing the context in these states so that they are no longer as appealing to criminal opportunists. Somalia is the first case the subcommittee took up, but I have no doubt that later hearings will focus

on Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, countries involved in the conflict diamonds trade. The right policy response to these complex crises will be distinct, nuanced, and multifaceted. But it will also entail efforts to address some of the transnational criminal networks that operate in weak states. The illicit diamond trade is a perfect example, and that is why I am so glad you are holding this hearing today.

I am particularly glad that you will be hearing from the Administration, because Congress needs to understand the position that US negotiators are taking at the Kimberely Process negotiations --- and the Administration needs to understand the will of Congress and the depth of our concern. I know that Worldvision, one of the NGOs working on the conflict diamonds issue, recently issued a "Report Card on Progress Toward Eliminating Conflict Diamonds." It gives process participants high marks in some areas, but fails them in others, particularly noting that the US is fighting a diamond certification system that might be viewed as a "restriction on trade." This concern appears to have led to an abandonment of the clean-stream approach, which leaves me wondering how the industry and US consumers would be protected.

Mr. Chairman, I know that many had hoped to see legislation passed by Congress and signed by the President last year. That was my hope, as well. But this issue is an important one, and we must take the time to make our best efforts. That said, let me be clear - I will not let the perfect be the enemy of the good when it comes to conflict diamonds legislation.

I look forward to reading the hearing transcript and to consulting with this subcommittee, my colleagues on the Foreign Relations Committee, and with Senators Gregg and Dewine after this hearing is over.

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