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Security Council (SC)

Research Report

Topic 3: Eradicating the use of conflict diamonds in financing war.



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Introduction

Conflict diamonds, also commonly referred to as blood diamonds, are mined in war zones and sold in order to fund insurgencies and rebel groups, particularly in Africa. The illicit trade of these diamonds has long posed a challenge to international peace and security in not only its funding of conflicts but the illicit trade's association with severe human rights violations such as forced labour, child exploitation, and violence. In this topic, the complexity of regulating international trade and addressing cross-national systemic exploitation is reflected. This research report will be looking at the existing challenges posed by the illicit trade of conflict diamonds, consider existing frameworks and global efforts addressing the topic, and aims to promote meaningful discourse and actionable solutions.

Definition of Key Terms

Conflict Diamonds: Diamonds mined in conflict zones and traded to finance armed conflicts.

Illicit Trade: The illegal production, distribution or sale of goods that evades legal regulations and official trade channels. Illicit trade enables the flow of resources from conflict regions to international markets to often fund armed groups and promote violence,

Sanctions: Economic or political measures, or penalty, imposed by governments and international bodies to restrict illegal and unwanted activities. Sanctions encourage compliance to international laws and human rights standards by pressuring conflict parties.

Artisanal Mining: Manual, labour-intensive, small-scale mining operations conducted by individuals and small groups. Although being able to provide livelihoods for local communities, artisanal mining occurs in unregulated environments that often witness poor working conditions and potential exploitation, especially in conflict zones

Supply Chain Due Diligence: The verification and investigation process of resources within a supply chain to validate that they are not associated with unethical practices. Due diligence is essential for promoting ethical sourcing in international trade and mitigates the trade of illicit resources.

Background Information

The diamond industry is a multi-billion-dollar global market which is driven by a demand for luxury items and jewellery as well as some industrial contributions such as drilling, cutting and grinding. The biggest producers being Russia, Botswana, Canada, Angola, DRC and more¹ with Africa accounting for a significant share of global production. However, with an emergence that can be traced back to the 1990s, the troubling reality of the diamond trade emerged. In brutal civil wars such as that in Angola, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, rebel groups controlled and exploited diamond-rich areas, using the revenue raised from the diamond sales to finance militaristic ambitions and war. These diamonds are now referred to as conflict diamonds, or blood diamonds. These groups commit further devastating atrocities such as forced labour, child labour, the recruitment of child soldiers, and mass killings, making conflict diamonds and their illicit trade an enabling actor of these atrocities and a critical concern to the international community.

As a result, in 2003, the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) was established. The KPCS aims to prevent the trade of conflict diamonds through their rigorous and thorough certification scheme.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/449683/global-mined-diamond-production-by-country/>

Despite this however, the use of conflict diamonds is not close to being eradicated. In recent years, the KPCS has faced significant criticism where its efficacy has been questioned with criticisms addressing its loopholes, narrow definition of conflict diamonds, weak enforcement and the failure to acknowledge diamonds that fund violence in government or military areas. Whilst the latter may seem like a rare occurrence, it is a common scenario. In Zimbabwe, the Marange diamond fields have been stricken with severe human rights abuses and violent crackdown at the hand of government forces. In 2008, the brutal assault of miners, resulting in the death of hundreds, were carried out by government forces. This horrifying incident is known as the Marange massacre.^{2 3} Another case is the case of the Russian state-owned mining company, Alrosa. With Russia as the largest producer of diamonds⁴, over 90% of Russia's diamonds come from Alrosa⁵. The funds generated by these diamonds are linked to funding the invasion of Ukraine. These blood diamonds are not defined as such under the KPCS, so therefore other measures such as sanctions have been taken. Though, there are many ways for these sanctions to be evaded such as favouring other trade hubs such as Mumbai, Ramat Gan, and Dubai instead of the main diamond hub, Antwerp. The trade of conflict diamonds, continue to flow into global markets and the supply chain under the guise of being ethical, despite international condemnation, due to the lack of transparency and the inadequate monitoring systems.

In Africa, the troubling trend has seen a continuation. Diamonds from conflict zones such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR), are still sold in international markets. This is done through indirectly entering the supply chain of major companies.^{6 7} In DRC, for example, armed groups such as the M23, have reportedly controlled diamond mining areas in eastern provinces with proceeds being used to finance armed conflict and human rights violation.⁸ In 2019, the Wagner Group, a Russian, Kremlin-linked, mercenary group, began to take over diamond, and gold mines, in CAR. In addition to the country's own militia's exploiting artisanal miners, the Wagner paramilitaries further devastate the miners and the mining towns with killings, human rights abuses and more, exacerbating the issue. This exploitation continues to fund violence and human rights abuses, perpetuating the instability in these regions, making it a key concern for the international stage.

Furthermore, the impact of conflict diamond is another concern. This is due to the fact that it often leads to severe deforestation, soil erosion, and water contamination. The lack of proper regulation and oversight, amplifies these environmental concerns. A 2020 report revealed that 18% of the Sierra Leone's deforestation occurred in diamond mining areas, contributing to widespread biodiversity loss in the areas.⁹ Additionally, the mining process also involves the disposal of waste materials, which can contaminate soil and water sources with its harmful chemicals. This further disrupts the local ecosystems as well as posing a significant health concern to the surrounding communities, who are already impacted by violence and instability.^{10 11}

² <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/06/26/diamonds-rough/human-rights-abuses-marange-diamond-fields-zimbabwe>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14377215>

⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/449683/global-mined-diamond-production-by-country/>

⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2023/russia-war-diamonds-holiday-shopping-ukraine/>

⁶ <https://ipisresearch.be/kimberley-process-lifts-conflict-diamonds-embargo-on-the-central-african-republic-qa/>

⁷ <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/central-african-republic-car/game-of-stones/?accessible=true>

⁸ <https://www.global-weekly.com/post/from-blood-diamonds-to-batteries-the-battle-for-resources-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo>

⁹ <https://gwnweb.org/2022/06/17/blood-diamonds-more-than-a-humanitarian-crisis/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ <https://www.imperial-consultants.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Final-report-Environmental-Impacts-of-Mined-Diamonds.pdf>

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – The DRC, tormented with conflict for over 30 years, is a major source of conflict diamonds, with armed militias exploiting diamond-rich regions to fund wars. The country has faced numerous challenges in reforming its diamond production to curb the illicit trade.¹²

Central African Republic (CAR) – The CAR is notorious for struggling with rebel groups using diamond revenues to fuel violence. This has been exacerbated by the presence of the Wagner group. International efforts are currently focused on stabilising the country's diamond trade to prevent their flow of conflict diamonds.

Russia – Russia is a major diamond producer, with their state-owned diamond mining company Alrosa. However, the country has faced international criticism in regard to conflict diamonds, not only for its own role in funding the invasion of Ukraine, but also for the involvement in African conflict diamonds relating to the Wagner group. As of January 2024, the EU and G7 countries have been placed on Russian origin diamonds.

United Nations – The UN has greatly supported global efforts to prevent the trade in conflict diamonds through supporting the KPCS and working on broader peace-building initiatives in the conflict affected regions. It also monitors the human rights violations related to diamond mining.

European Union – The EU has also supported efforts to eradicate the use of conflict diamonds in financing war, through regulations and sanctions. Countries like Belgium, the world diamond trading hub, have taken steps to ensure ethical sources, however many challenges remain.¹³

Relevant UN Resolutions

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948)

While not a resolution, this foundational document outlines the basic rights and freedoms to which all individuals are entitled to. Its relevance lies in its ability to guide international policies, other resolutions, and actions, serving as a benchmark to promoting human rights. It is crucial in addressing human rights violations such as those witnessed in the mining of conflict diamonds

UNSC Resolution 1459 (2003)

This resolution calls for the establishment of the KPCS and defines conflict diamonds. It aims at ensuring that diamonds traded globally are not used to fund wars and armed conflicts whilst underscoring the need for international cooperation in keeping them away from the global supply chain.

UNGA Resolution A/RES/78/270 (2024)

The most recent resolution on this topic, which reaffirms the role of the KPCS and calls for a stronger enforcement of it. It addresses the loopholes of the certification scheme and the importance of

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/21/a-guide-to-the-decades-long-conflict-in-dr-congo>

¹³ https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-07/guidelines_on_trading_with_the_european_union.pdf

addressing them to prevent conflict diamonds from reaching the global market.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS)

Established in 2003 with support from the UN, the KPCS is an international certification scheme which aims to prevent the illicit trade of conflict diamonds, in which their definition “qualifies the rough diamonds used by rebel movements or their allies to finance armed conflicts aimed at undermining legitimate governments.”¹⁴ It has successfully reduced the trade of conflict diamonds, with over 80 represented countries participating to improve market transparency, the KPCS has made great strides. However, there has been great criticism on the limited definition, and weak enforcement of the KPCS.

Possible Solutions

Reforming the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme (KPCS)

One viewpoint could be that the KPCS needs to be reformed to address its shortcomings. This could include tightening regulations to ensure better monitoring of diamond trade and expanding the definition of conflict diamonds to include those linked to human rights abuses in addition to rebel groups.

Consumer Education and Awareness

A solution could be to raise consumer awareness about the impact of their diamond purchases. By educating consumers on the issue of conflict diamonds and offering ethical alternatives, such as lab grown diamonds, demand for conflict-free diamonds could increase.

Enforcing Fair Trade Standards: A viewpoint could be to enforce ethical standards in the diamond industry, similar to the approach taken with coffee. Rather than simply cutting off sellers, it would be more effective to work with them to improve conditions. By involving sellers in the solution, they can help ensure humane practices, improve worker lives, and reduce exploitation. This approach has worked in the coffee industry, and many believe it could transform the diamond industry into a more ethical and sustainable source of income for workers.

¹⁴ <https://www.kimberleyprocess.com/about/what-is-kp>

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