



13 November, 2019

Press Release Kimberley Process Civil Society Coalition

For immediate release

“Make-or-break moment for Kimberley Process to restore faith and stop flow of blood diamonds”

For over a decade, civil society and increasingly industry observers to the Kimberley Process have been decrying how the scheme is failing to stop diamonds affected by various forms of conflict from flowing onto international markets. Now, at the end of a three-year reform cycle, it is up to the 82 participating states meeting in New Delhi from 18 to 22 November, to take their responsibility in finally addressing the most significant flaws in the scheme’s scope and efficacy. This includes broadening the narrow definition of conflict diamonds, improving the governance framework and ensuring respect for the tripartite nature of the KP by allowing both civil society and industry to fully take up their role as watchdogs and advisors to the process.

KP fails to live up to its purpose

The Kimberley Process (KP) is an international mechanism intended to prevent the flow of conflict diamonds onto the global market through the implementation of an import/export certification scheme applicable to rough diamonds. Problematically, the certification scheme is losing its purpose and relevance because of the KP’s narrow conflict diamond definition.

“While KP certificates claim to guarantee the conflict-free provenance of stones, as a matter of fact the scheme only intervenes where diamonds are exploited by rebels to fight governments”, explains Shamiso Mtisi, Zimbabwe-based coordinator of the KP’s civil society coalition (CSC). At present, solely diamonds from non-compliant zones in war-torn Central African Republic are refused KP certificates.

Diamonds tainted by other types of conflict, such as sexual violence, torture, inhumane treatment and environmental crimes, or violence and killings by actors other than rebels, continue to flow onto the international market largely unchecked. Worse, the Kimberley Process certifies such diamonds as “conflict free”, potentially aiding to whitewash such stones vis-à-vis unwitting jewellery consumers reliant on KP assurance.

In a [recent report](#), the KP CSC spotlighted that up to today brutal human rights abuses in diamond mining areas are committed by both public and private security forces across the African continent and beyond, affecting both artisanal and industrial production. Despite its conflict prevention rhetoric, the Kimberley Process allows such abuses to continue.

All eyes on participating states

Whereas civil society and industry observers have been vehemently pushing for reform in numerous meetings and working groups, decision-making power in the KP rests solely with state actors. During the New Delhi plenary, the last meeting of a 3-year reform cycle, they have a final shot at addressing violence and human rights abuses in communities affected by diamond mining and trading, thus restoring the waning public confidence in the scheme. “The bottom bar of any such effort should be stopping major cases of serious violence across the diamond supply chain, irrespective of the perpetrator or context in which these occur,” says Hans Merket, researcher for Belgian-based KPCSC member IPIS.

Association of diamonds with blood, violence and cruelties are not only problematic in themselves, they moreover undermine the development potential of diamonds for those countries that rightly stand to benefit from them. With a diamond sector in turmoil, and synthetic stones competing with natural diamonds on both ethics and price, the future of the sector hinges on consumers associating diamonds with positive values like equitable and sustainable development.

“If the KP does not succeed in moving beyond its niche focus, and in providing genuine assurances to diamond consumers that their purchases are not tainted with blood, it will continue to lose credibility”, stresses Hans Merket. “Worse, the process will become ever more irrelevant in a world that is increasingly moving towards responsible mineral governance.”

Threats to reform

Civil society has actively contributed to ongoing reforms with various proposals related to widening the scope of the KP and to broader governance issues. The latter include the establishment of a permanent secretariat, a multi-donor fund to support tripartite participation, and improvement of the scheme’s peer review mechanism.

“On all these issues we have sought to promote improved diamond sector governance and protect the rights of diamond mining communities,” highlights Shamiso Mtisi. “We are committed to continue this constructive engagement in New Delhi, but at the same time we are concerned about resistance to reform from various sides, which risks to jeopardise this make-or-break moment for the KP.”

It is equally alarming that some actors are seeking to close civic space, outside as well as within the Kimberley Process. “If the KP wants to remain a genuine tripartite process, we call on all participants to actively value and protect the much-needed watchdog role of civil society throughout the KP system”, stresses Shamiso Mtisi.

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