

Upfront

HOPE DIAMONDS

Building a brighter future in Africa

The issues surrounding diamonds in Africa are as complex and multi-faceted as the African continent itself. The troubles with “conflict diamonds,” or diamonds used to fund devastating civil wars in Africa, have been covered widely in the newspapers, broadcast on national news, and even featured in music videos, documentaries, and movies.

Although the civil wars in the main conflict regions of Sierra Leone and Angola have ended, “conflict” in Africa has not. And it’s very hard to pinpoint: areas torn apart by civil war are now headed toward more peaceful times, while places that haven’t yet made the nighttime news are teetering on the edge of violence.

The Kimberley Process, a certification system created by the diamond industry and non-governmental organizations such as Global Witness, has helped bring the percentage of conflict diamonds currently on the market down significantly, by some accounts as low as one percent.

However, “conflict” is only part of the problem. Add to that the issues of fair wages, child labor, worker safety, and environmental damage that are still unresolved, and you have to wonder: *Is it possible to buy an African diamond that does more good than harm?*

The answer, increasingly, is yes. In wealthier, more peaceful countries such as South Africa, Botswana, and



Above: Pride Diamonds builds schools and supports orphanages as part of its corporate good will in Sierra Leone.

Below: The “Eighty-Eight” diamond from Finesse Diamonds.

Namibia, the African people who have helped the diamond industry make its fortune over the past century have new opportunities. Historically, black Africans participated in the diamond industry primarily as miners. Now, they’ve made inroads into the more highly skilled and better-paying areas of the diamond trade, such as sales and marketing.

In Botswana, founding president Sir Seretse Kama had the vision nearly 40 years ago to begin partnering with diamond firms in order to harness the power of Botswana’s diamonds. Botswana, once one of the world’s poorest economies, now achieves 75 percent of its gross domestic product directly from the diamond trade, and its citizens have the highest per capita income on the continent.

Namibia has begun to interpret Botswana’s partnership model for the benefit of its people, too. New York-based Finesse Diamonds works with a highly skilled Namibian workforce to cut and polish diamonds mined and sourced in Namibia for its branded diamond line, “The Eighty Eight.” Finesse Diamonds president Alex Twersky places great emphasis on the fine quality of these diamonds, but he places an even greater value on sourcing verifiable origin stones that are ethically mined, procured, and sold. “We want to feel assured that we have done our share to uphold the integrity and fair treatment of everyone in the diamond supply chain.” *Continued on next page*

But what about West Africa, lands that the industry has mined and profited from for nearly 100 years—and whose people have seen next-to-none of the profits? For countries such as Sierra Leone, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, ethical diamond revenue that directly benefits citizens is the only way out of unspeakable poverty. As these countries go about the business of rebuilding their war-torn communities, profits from the diamond industry will play a key role in the development of a healthy, productive, and sustainable economy.

According to Ed Zwick, producer of the movie *Blood Diamond*, “To suggest that we no longer buy [West African] stones is to go deeper into the same denial that created the situation in the first place.... What would happen if the diamond industry decided to dedicate a portion of every single West African diamond sale to the rebuilding of infrastructure and the creation of sustainable development?”

One company on the forefront of West African beneficiation is doing just that. Pride Diamonds, a US-based company founded in 2005 by Wade Watson and Andrew Greenblatt, works with local land owners and chiefdoms to mine Sierra Leone’s rural landscape with respect for both people and the environment. When a mining operation

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Above: Miners at Pride Diamonds operations in Sierra Leone.



Left: Namibian workers polish diamonds for Finesse Diamonds.




Diamond jewelry from Ruff&Cut, made with Sierra Leone diamonds.

ation is complete, Pride Diamonds fills in the worksite so mining holes won't fill up with standing water and breed mosquitoes that spread disease.

In addition to creating jobs and safe, fair work environments, Pride Diamonds gives back to the communities where it does business. According to Watson, "We are committed not only to best practices within the mining industry, but also to diverting a substantial portion of profits to building desperately needed infrastructure, like schools and hospitals."

Jewelry made with Pride Diamonds is available online from designer Sarah Perlis, and at retail from ABC Car-

pet and Home's Grounded Jewels collection. In addition, Watson has launched his own line of jewelry, Ruff&Cutt, a collection of over 40 pieces made with Sierra Leone diamonds and the gold tailings that are a bi-product of his company's mining. Ten percent of each sale goes to improving conditions for African women and children.

"Ruff&Cut jewelry celebrates the beauty of social responsibility," says Watson. "Women who are drawn to this line want to wear jewelry that reflects their values, and understand the need for luxury goods that positively impact the lives of African miners, their families, and their communities." 

For the Children

The AWEAR: Jewelry for Conscious Kids collection was launched in April 2008 by Whiteflash.com in hopes of inspiring children to work toward a better world by standing up for those children affected by illicit diamond trading in war-torn areas of the world.

Versatile gold charms accented with delicate diamonds can be worn on a small chain or in various combinations on a charm bracelet. Twenty-five percent of all proceeds from sales of the collection will go to the World Centers of Compassion for Children International, a non-profit organization that focuses on providing educational opportunities and building stability for children who have been victimized by the illicit trade of diamonds.

"Our mission is to inspire compassion in the hearts of our youth and encourage them to take seriously matters of social and moral responsibility," remarks Debi Wexler, CEO, Whiteflash.com. "These beautiful charms are a stylish way for them to spread the word—and lead the charge."

AWEAR charm bracelet featuring (counterclockwise): Finding Hope, Progression, Dreams of Africa, and Tides of Change charms.

