



# Zimbabwe — Urgent Need For A Solution

The situation in the country's violence-torn Marange diamond fields has brought the issue of blood diamonds to the centre of world media attention and threatens to adversely impact the global diamond industry, reports VINOD KURIYAN.



The secret mile-long airfield under construction near Zimbabwe's diamond fields.

Most people don't realise the sheer size and potential of Zimbabwe's Marange diamond fields. They cover a staggering 660 square kilometres, and though there are no scientific estimates, are rumoured by industry buzz to be able to yield some 40 million carats a year of diamonds that are on average of superior clarity and colour. In a world where the biggest diamond mines have peaked and are now sliding into production decline while no new mines have been discovered in years, they hold the potential to completely rewrite the future of some of the world's biggest diamond and jewellery companies.

Unfortunately, for the past three years, Marange has also witnessed the kind of brutal human rights abuses – murder, rape, loot, assault, arbitrary detention and forced labour – that triggered a horrific civil war in Sierra Leone that also engulfed Liberia and funded an equally horrifying conflict in Angola between the government and UNITA rebels led by Jonas Savimbi. These brutal wars and their funding by the mining of alluvial diamonds, also led to the coining of the term "blood diamonds".

Trying to untangle the situation is a group of governments, non-governmental organisations and the global diamond industry, who are all part of an international monitoring and audit system known as the Kimberley Process. The KP, as it is universally known as, came into being as a result of campaigning by non-governmental organisations like Global Witness, Partnership Africa Canada and others, that exposed the role of diamonds in funding

the terrible conflicts in Angola, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The system's aim is to exclude conflict diamonds from international markets and prevent diamond-fuelled wars.

The KP operates an import-export certification scheme which requires participating governments to certify the origin of rough diamonds, and puts in place effective controls to prevent "conflict stones" from entering the supply chain. Participant countries must enact domestic legislation to implement the scheme, and can only trade rough diamonds with other members. This creates a strong incentive for countries that want to produce, trade or process uncut stones to join. As of 2010, there are 75 governments participating in the KP.

Now there are calls for the KP to sanction Zimbabwe for generating exactly the kind of situation it was set up to combat. Global Witness, one of the NGOs in the KP, in a report titled *Return Of The Blood Diamond*, said, "From early 2007, when police officers stationed in the fields began forcing miners to work in syndicates under their control; demanding bribes and beating or killing anyone else they found mining in the area."

The Global Witness report goes on to say, "The violence in Marange reached a peak in autumn 2008, with the arrival of the army, and the launch of Operation 'Hakudzokwi', or 'You will not return'. This operation appeared to have two goals: to ensure control of the diamond deposits for the Zanu PF elite, and to reward the army for its loyalty to this clique. More than 800 soldiers were deployed alongside helicopter gunships, killing over 200 people.

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“Following this operation, soldiers took over mining syndicates previously run by the police, and forced local people, including children, to mine for them. The military was also central in facilitating the smuggling of these diamonds out of Zimbabwe to neighbouring countries including Mozambique and South Africa. Once again, civilians found digging for diamonds independently of the syndicates were severely beaten or killed as a warning to others.”

In response, the Kimberley Process sent a review mission to Zimbabwe in June 2009 to investigate these reports and assess whether the country was in compliance with the KP’s minimum standards. The mission found evidence of grave human rights abuses, armed soldiers managing syndicates of miners and a “smuggling operation that enables rough diamonds to flow from Zimbabwe outside the KPCS (*Kimberley Process Certification Scheme*) largely operated and maintained by official entities”.

The KP review mission recommended that the country be suspended from the scheme for at least six months.

Following these developments, Zimbabwe called for the setting up of joint-venture companies to mine diamonds in Marange. But the Global Witness report says, “Today the situation in the Marange diamond fields remains critical. The Zimbabwean authorities claim that the joint venture companies they have recently established and given permits to mine in Marange will help regulate the diamond sector and improve standards. However, the fact is that these companies are only operating in around 3 per cent of the diamond fields, with the remaining 97 per cent under the control of the army.”

The Global Witness report also states, “the army continues to operate syndicates of miners as a means of capturing the proceeds of this illegal trade. Although access to the Marange diamond fields has been severely restricted, testimony gathered from victims by local civil society representatives, shows that serious human rights abuses, including assault

and rape, are still being committed by the army and the police.”

The problem in dealing with the Zimbabwe situation has grown out of the fact that the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) is designed to be an inter-governmental initiative and relies on consensus-based decision-making. As one industry veteran put it, “The system runs into problems when a participating government is itself one of the accused. Zimbabwe, naturally, is going to deny that and of course, wouldn’t vote against itself!”

### India’s stance

While many call for Zimbabwe to be expelled from the KP and isolated, many like Vasant Mehta, chairman of India’s Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council, think a move like this would only remove the last semblance of control at Marange and lead to smuggling on a large scale.

“The problem,” he says, “is that the diamonds can all too easily be smuggled to a country that is KP compliant and then find their way into the global processing pipeline with legitimate papers. That is something we most certainly don’t want. There’s not much you can do once the diamonds have acquired legitimate papers. We’ve got to do something about the human rights situation – perhaps get United Nations participation if need be – to ensure that the diamonds from Marange are truly KP compliant. But we must keep Zimbabwe engaged all the time. India stands ready to pitch in with the international community to do whatever is necessary.”

While many call for all Zimbabwe diamonds to be banned from the international process pipeline as a means of isolating and thereby controlling the problem, there are other complications. The Marange fields are not the only diamond source in Zimbabwe. The Murowa mine, run by mining giant Rio Tinto, also produces diamonds. “It would be very easy to call for all Zimbabwe stones to be banned from the global process pipeline,” says Mehta,



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“but there are two issues – first, it wouldn’t be possible to identify all the diamonds that came out of Zimbabwe and second, a ban would mean that the production from Murowa too would be banned. This would be a great injustice as Murowa pays its workers decent wages, maintains proper working conditions, has medical cover for all its staff and even has a school program for their children. How can you punish someone for that?”

Indeed, many industry watchers point out that just ousting Zimbabwe from the KP might only encourage what they see as another ominous development. In January this year, it was revealed that a secret airfield with a mile long runway was being constructed in the area. In a report that included a photograph of the airfield under construction, Britain’s *Telegraph* newspaper reported:

“Diplomats and analysts believe that the mile-long runway is intended for arms shipments, probably from China, for which troops loyal to President Robert Mugabe would pay on the spot with gemstones from the Chiadzwa diamond mines. Aerial pictures show construction work is well under way, with a newly built control tower apparently complete and the runway nearly ready for surfacing.

The report also stated, “There are other airfields within a short distance of the mining area, and no obvious need for a runway long enough for transport planes to take off and land even closer to the mines. A Western diplomat said the existence of the runway, out of sight except from the air, was ‘extremely’ worrying.”

According to the report, “China has long been Zimbabwe’s main source of arms, but delivery has been more difficult since a shipment was blocked in South Africa three years ago. Other deliveries have come in through the Mozambican port of Beira, but government officials in the country’s capital, Maputo, have expressed concern over the issue.”

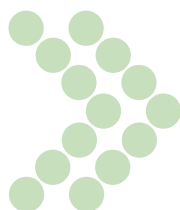
The report goes on to say, “The army has also been frustrated in its attempts to buy weapons by Zimbabwe’s finance minister, Tendai Biti, a member of the MDC (*the opposition party that is in a power-sharing agreement with Robert Mugabe’s ZANU-PF*) who has blocked new arms purchases since taking control of the treasury under last year’s power-sharing deal. But the new facility would give Zimbabwe’s Joint Operations Command, the military top brass who long swore they would never recognise Mr Tsvangirai’s authority, a way to obtain weapons independently. A Western diplomat claimed the head of Zimbabwe’s armed forces, Constantine Chiwenga, had been ‘very busy’ with the Chinese recently, adding: ‘We are concerned he is buying weapons.’”

### Credibility questioned

Global concern over the issue prompted the KP to appoint South Africa’s Abbey Chikane as its Monitor, to review the situation in Zimbabwe and decide whether it was indeed in compliance with the KP’s minimum requirements list. Chikane duly went to Zimbabwe and conducted an inspection. Matters were then clouded further when Zimbabwean activist Farai Maguwu, director of the Centre for Research and Development (CRD), who has decried what he termed widespread human rights abuses by the Zimbabwe government, was arrested following a meeting with Chikane. Both Partnership Africa Canada and Global Witness stated in press releases that Chikane had scheduled the timing of the meeting with Maguwu and its location and that when Maguwu arrived, Zimbabwean state intelligence officials were also present, even though Chikane had been warned about the risks to Maguwu. Within days of the meeting, the press statements added, police arrived at CRD’s offices looking for Maguwu in relation to information they alleged he had passed to Chikane. Maguwu went into hiding but turned himself in after police had severely beaten a member of his family.



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## The KP Civil Society Coalition called on KP member governments to take action to halt state-sponsored human rights abuses and smuggling in Zimbabwe's Marange diamond fields and preserve the credibility of the diamond certification scheme.

“The credibility and viability of the monitor, and the monitoring arrangement in Zimbabwe have been compromised,” said Bernard Taylor, executive director of Partnership Africa Canada, in the press statement. “Maguwu’s arrest is directly related to the fact that he has provided the Kimberley Process with valuable information about events in Marange.”

The KP Civil Society Coalition also called on Kimberley Process member governments to take action to halt state-sponsored human rights abuses and smuggling in Zimbabwe’s Marange diamond fields and preserve the credibility of the diamond certification scheme. The coalition called on the KP to take the following actions:

- Suspend Abbey Chikane as Kimberley Process monitor.
- Suspend the monitoring arrangement for Marange diamonds introduced in November as part of the joint work plan between Zimbabwe and the Kimberley Process.
- Suspend Zimbabwe from the Kimberley Process until there is evidence that human rights abuses in the diamond fields have ceased and Zimbabwe is complying fully with Kimberley Process minimum requirements.



Farai Maguwu



Abbey Chikane

“Zimbabwe has been breaking all the rules and shouldn’t be allowed to ship blood diamonds onto international markets,” said Alfred Brownell from Green Advocates, Liberia. “KP governments’ failure to address the crisis in Marange so far is a betrayal, not only of the victims of abuse, but of the scheme’s founding principles.”

The complexity of the problem became apparent when at the recent KP Intersessional Meeting held in Israel from June 21 to 23 –

which Maguwu was originally scheduled to address with information on the situation in Zimbabwe – no consensus could be reached on whether or not Zimbabwe’s diamonds should be banned from the international market. But that the problem needed to be urgently addressed was apparent as the KP decided to convene a special meeting on the Zimbabwe situation in St. Petersburg, Russia, on July 14 and 15.

Meanwhile, Avi Paz, president of the World Federation of Diamond Bourses (WFDB), issued a statement calling on all stakeholders – governments, NGOs and industry members – to cooperate in working towards a solution to the Marange mining issue that would be viable and acceptable to all sides.

In the meantime, Paz issued a stern warning to members of the industry, reminding them that diamonds originating from Marange should not be purchased until approved by the Kimberley Process Working Group on Monitoring. As no approval has yet been given, any member found doing so will be subject to WFDB disciplinary procedures.

“There is no other industry in the world that has taken regulatory measures similar to that of the KP,” Paz said. “In addition, we have seen no other industries come together to assure that its products are untainted. The fact that the diamond industry is under scrutiny is because all parties who are involved have a common interest in protecting the integrity of the global diamond industry and trade, and as such advance consumer confidence in diamonds.”

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe continues to be an issue that threatens to blow up in the face of the diamond industry worldwide with a potentially disastrous consumer backlash. ■