ARTISTS FOR AMNESTY

ARTISTS FOR AMNESTY IS A GROUP OF ARTISTS COMMITTED TO PREVENTING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, SAVING LIVES AND PROMOTING A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS.

MONTHLY BULLETIN

DECEMBER 2006

Welcome to the *Artists for Amnesty Monthly Bulletin*, which will keep you informed on critical human rights issues, cases of individuals at risk, and the life-saving work of Amnesty International. Our Monthly Bulletin will also highlight the efforts of artists on behalf of human rights.

BLOOD DIAMOND

Amnesty International USA is proud to announce its support of the film *Blood Diamond*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Djimon Hounsou and Jennifer Connelly and directed by Edward Zwick. The screenplay was written by Charles Leavitt (The Mighty), from a story by Leavitt and C. Gaby Mitchell. *Blood Diamond* is produced by Paula Weinstein, Marshall Herskovitz, Edward Zwick, Graham King and Gillian Gorfil. The executive producers are Len Amato and Benjamin Waisbren, with Kevin De La Noy co-producing. The film opens December 8th.

© Warner Bros. 2006

Set against the backdrop of the chaos and civil war that enveloped 1990s Sierra Leone, *Blood Diamond* is the story of Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio), a South African mercenary, and Solomon Vandy (Djimon Hounsou), a Mende fisherman. Both men are African, but their histories and their circumstances are as different as any can be — until their fates become joined in a common quest to recover a rare pink diamond that can transform their lives. While in prison for smuggling, Archer learns that Solomon — who was taken from his family and forced to work in the diamond fields - has found and hidden the extraordinary rough stone. With the help of Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly), an American journalist whose idealism is tempered by a deepening connection with Archer, the two men embark on a trek through rebel territory. More than a search for a valuable diamond, the journey could save Solomon's family and give Archer the second chance he thought he would never have.

DIAMONDS, CONFLICT AND CHILD SOLDIERS

What are conflict diamonds?

Conflict diamonds, also known as blood diamonds, are diamonds that are used by rebel groups to fuel conflict and civil wars. They have funded brutal conflicts in Africa that have resulted in the death and displacement of millions of people. Diamonds have also been used by terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda to finance their activities, and for money-laundering purposes.

Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia and Sierra Leone are still recovering from widespread devastation resulting from wars funded by diamonds.

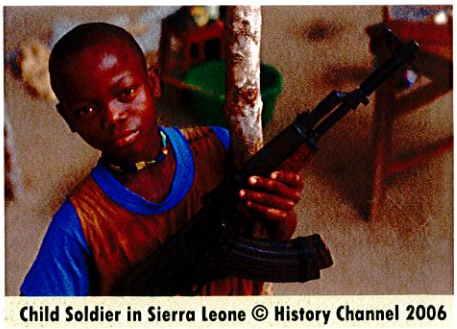
The number of conflict diamonds has been significantly reduced due to peace agreements that have been signed in countries in Western and Southern Africa. But more diamond-fuelled wars could happen in the future unless the Kimberley Process, a self-regulated initiative by the diamond industry to deal with conflict diamonds, strengthens government controls and the diamond industry cleans up its act.

Statistics cannot adequately illustrate the human cost of wars in which millions of lives have been lost, there has been widespread human suffering and devastation, and economies have been destroyed. As the brutal conflict in Sierra Leone demonstrated, even a small amount of trade in conflict diamonds can wreak enormous havoc and have terrible consequences on those caught in the crossfire.

Diamonds have directly funded several wars in Africa that have destroyed lives, killing, maiming and displacing millions and destroying livelihoods. In many other diamond rich countries in Africa, diamonds have failed to contribute positively to development. Instead, little benefit goes to those that need it most, including the million or more artisanal diamond miners and their communities who often live in conditions of dire poverty.

Governments, the diamond industry, and non-governmental organizations must take an active role in addressing the political, social and economic challenges facing the artisanal diamond mining sector in order to ensure that it contributes to sustainable development.

Child Soldiers



Child Soldier in Sierra Leone © History Channel 2006

It is currently estimated that over 300,000 children under the age of 18 participate in various armed conflicts in over 30 countries worldwide. International law explicitly prohibits the recruitment and use of children under 18. To recruit or use children under 15 is a war crime.

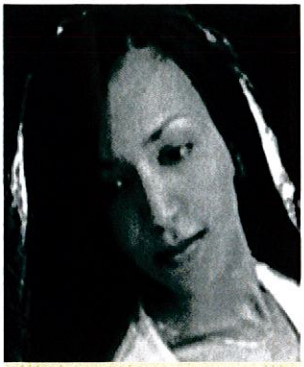
Armed groups in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, and Côte d'Ivoire continue to use child soldiers and have yet to demobilize and reintegrate many children who have been used for armed conflict.

The use of child soldiers is particularly widespread in Côte d'Ivoire where armed groups in the North still oppose a transitional government. An estimated 20,000 children have been abducted as child soldiers and sex slaves by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda, a country plagued by years of internal conflict and violence. But a peace agreement is currently under negotiation.

GET UP, STAND UP

ERITREA

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE FREED


Helene Berhane

Helen Berhane, a well-known Christian evangelical singer, was released from captivity in Eritrea. She had been detained incommunicado without charge or trial for two and a half years. Most of her detention was spent in inhuman and degrading conditions inside a metal shipping container which was used as a prison cell. The authorities reportedly tortured her many times to make her recant her faith. Helen was hospitalized as a result of beatings and is said to be confined to a wheelchair. She refused to abandon her faith despite the threats and ill-treatment.

Notwithstanding Helen Berhane's release, Amnesty International remains concerned that the systematic persecution of people on the basis of their religion continues unabated in Eritrea.

On October 15-16, 2006, over 150 men, women and children, members of the Kale Hiwot (Word of God) Church, the Full Gospel Church, the Church of the Living God and the Rema Church, were arrested at their homes in Mendefera town, south of the capital Asmara. Twelve members of the Rema church were also arrested in Adi-Quala town, further south, for worshipping in a private home. Two of them, Immanuel Andegergesh and Kibrom Firemichael, reportedly died in a nearby army camp as a result of torture.

Since 2002, only the Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran Christian churches and Islam have been allowed to operate in Eritrea. Members of some 35 minority Christian evangelical churches face fierce persecution, even though freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution. An estimated 2,000 members of minority churches, including about 20 pastors, are currently detained. Detainees are held incommunicado in harsh conditions without charge or trial. They are imprisoned in police stations at first, then in army camps and security prisons in different parts of the country, including the main military training centre at Sawa. Some are held in metal shipping containers and underground prisons. Several detainees have become seriously ill and are rarely provided with adequate medical treatment. They are repeatedly tortured by being beaten and being tied up in painful positions, in an effort to make them cease worshipping and recant their faith.

AIUSA activists sent cards of support and appeals for her release as part of AIUSA's Holiday Card and Easter Actions. We'd also like to thank Music for Human Rights supporters and their fans, including Gwen Stefani, Duran Duran, Coldplay, Sting, Anti-Flag, Incubus, Bright Eyes, Astralwerks Records and Axis of Justice who helped make Helen's release a reality.

Thank you!

No further action is required.

CONFLICT DIAMOND SALON

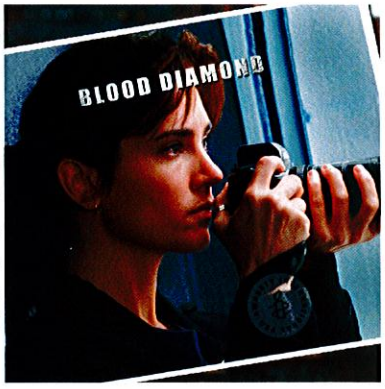
(Left to right) Charmain Gooch (Global Witness), author Jimmy Briggs, producer Bill Brummel, and Professor Alyson Warhurst. © AIUSA 2006

On November 14, 2006, AFA co-hosted a salon with Global Witness to discuss the issues of conflict diamond and child soldiers. Speakers included Charmian Gooch, Director of Global Witness (the NGO with whom AI partners on its conflict diamond work), Jimmie Briggs, author, journalist and expert on child soldiers, Bill Brummell, producer of the upcoming History Channel documentary, "Blood Diamonds" and Professor Alyson Warhurst, founder of Maplecroft. The salon took place at CAA. During the evening a joint site was unveiled:

www.blooddiamondaction.org

The first act of *Blood Diamonds*, a new documentary premiering on **The History Channel® Saturday, December 23, 2006** at **10:00 p.m. ET/PT**, was screened, and a panel discussion followed. The documentary looks to some of the world's foremost experts for the facts of the history of the diamond trade, and goes to the heart of the issue, interviewing both the victims and perpetrators of diamond-fueled atrocities in countries like Sierra Leone. **BLOOD DIAMONDS** explores the factors that led to the violence, tells the vivid details of the suffering, and speaks with the organizations that eventually exposed the link between diamonds and several brutal African conflicts.

GET INVOLVED



Help Amnesty International USA by downloading *Blood Diamond* wallpaper for your mobile phone. The mobile wallpaper features Academy Award Winner and star of Blood Diamond, Jennifer Connelly. Ms. Connelly serves as Amnesty International's Ambassador for Human Rights Education. Proceeds donated to Amnesty International.

You can also purchase the Blood Diamond/Clean Diamond Bracelet and show your support for the film and the work of Amnesty International and Global Witness by logging onto:

www.blooddiamondaction.org or

www.amnestyusa.org/store

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