



medico international



INPUT: 10 YEARS OF FATAL TRANSACTIONS BY ANNE JUNG, MEDICO INTERNATIONAL

As staff member of medico international and a founding member of the Fatal Transactions campaign against the trade in conflict resources I am delighted today, on the occasion of the campaign's 10-year anniversary next year, to look back and to share some thoughts with you on the current course of the campaign.

1) The Fatal Transactions Campaign started in 1999 at exactly the right time.

a) For decades, the value of a diamond was exclusively determined by the 4 Cs - Cut, Colour, Clarity, and Carat. Only when non-governmental organizations drew public and international attention to the issue with the Fatal Transactions' campaign and other initiatives, was a fifth added to the four Cs: Conflict. The goal of the campaign: Fatal Transactions is dedicated to transform Fatal Transactions into Fair Transactions; Transactions that contribute to sustainable peace and reconstruction in Africa.

b) The civil wars of the late 1990s in countries like Angola, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo were significantly financed by the trade in conflict diamonds. The diamond trade was not the cause, but the engine of the conflict. In 1999 a study by Global Witness was able to prove the connection between the Angolan rebel movement UNITA and the diamond company De Beers. This constituted an important empirical basis for the campaign.

Not without justification, the industry feared that the value of the diamonds, artificially created by multi-million Dollar promotional efforts, could be damaged by the connection with African civil wars. First scratches appeared in the industry's image, analysts advised – as the German Handelsblatt reported in April 2000 – to sell De Beers shares because of the looming campaign.

c) At the end of the 1990s the constitution of the diamond industry was very vulnerable, as it faced an excess supply of diamonds and held stones to a value of several billion U.S.\$ out of the market to artificially stabilize the price.

Taken together, these factors generated such enormous political pressure that soon the diamond industry could be convinced to rethink its activities. Immediately after the campaign launch, De Beers for example, announced its withdrawal from Angola. Beyond, the media attention strengthened the enforcement of the existing UN-sanctions.

For good reason Fatal Transactions never required a general boycott of diamonds because of – as the campaign mentioned in our first manifesto –the positive effects of the diamond trade in countries like Botswana.

In 2000, non-governmental organizations contributed to the initiation of the Kimberley Process to stop the trade in conflict diamonds.

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) of 2002 would not have come to be without the pressure of NGOs. In October 1999 one of the campaign's first press releases reads: "Fatal Transactions calls for De Beers to work for the establishment of an independent examination board that certifies rough diamonds."

2) The Kimberley Process certification scheme is both the biggest success thus far and the greatest challenge to the Fatal Transactions campaign.

Under the KPCS, which came about with contributions from several NGOs such as Global Witness, Partnership Africa Canada and Network Movement for Justice and Development from Sierra Leone, more than 70 states have since committed themselves to renounce the trade in conflict diamonds. This includes intra-state control and certification of all exports of rough diamonds. The KPCS is a result of constructive collaboration between governments, industry and civil society.

¹ Fatal Transactions was founded in 1998 by the Frankfurt aid and human rights organization medico international, together with the research organization Global Witness and IPIS as well as the aid organizations NOVIB and NIZA. The first empirical basis of the campaign was constituted by the study "A rough trade" published by the British research organization Global Witness in 1998, which describes the dealings of diamond companies like De Beers with the Angolan rebel organization UNITA. It was followed in 2000 by the study "The Heart of the Matter" about the diamond-financed war in Sierra Leone by Partnership Africa Canada (PAC).

But in the narrow legal sense, the KPCS is not a legally binding agreement.

In principle, legally unsecured agreements carry the risk of being instrumentalised by industrial enterprises for image-improvement, without such agreements contributing to tangible and sustainable political changes. Therefore Fatal Transactions and other NGO representatives urge a revision regarding the liability and the practical implementation of the KPCS:

a) Diamonds from conflict regions such as the Ivory Coast still reach the international market. Just recently the resource-financed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo has erupted again.

b) The definition of conflict diamonds is insufficient as it is limited to diamonds traded by illegitimate actors such as rebel movements.

c) Even in officially pacified regions, grave human rights violations and working conditions akin to slavery accompany diamond mining.

With the continuation of economic and social exclusion, the conditions are created for a renewed outbreak of armed struggle, whose cause were not the raw-materials themselves, but the inequality and arbitrariness to which especially the young people in the diamond regions have been and continue to be exposed.

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme has since become to be treated as a model for a general definition of conflict resources. Therefore, a greater legal liability of the certification system is of particular significance.

The industry's cooperation is commendable, especially in the case of the diamond industry, and will continue at this conference and in the next few years. In this however, the different interests and objectives of NGOs, business and politics should not be blurred.

3) Challenges for the Fatal Transactions campaign

So far, Fatal Transactions has placed the focus of the campaign on the dialogue with the industry, lobbying and research activities, and less on the mobilization of the public – the force “from below”. It cannot be excluded that a more substantial convention against conflict diamonds would have been politically feasible had there been significant international pressure from civil society such as prior to the adoption of the Convention against anti-personnel mines.

It is a basic truth that NGOs do not have influence on political decision makers and the practice of industrial enterprises because power has been formally transferred to them, but because NGOs are themselves an expression of independent publics, are carried by them and share specific expertise and interests with them. To create critical publics and simultaneously to bring back politics to the centre stage of claims should be a central task of campaigning.

New forms of action and communication must thus be found to keep the public interest awake and awaken it in new circles. The exhibition “Raw materials for a just world” that will be opened tonight in the context of this conference, is an important contribution in this respect. It underlines that the trade with Conflict Commodities bears one loser in this huge business: The people. In solidarity with them I wish us all first successes in “Digging for Peace”.

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medico international

Anne Jung
Burgstr. 106
D-60389 Frankfurt
Tel. +49 (0)69/ 94 43 827
jung@medico.de