

Conflict diamonds assignment

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Introduction “ People lose hands, legs, arms for real. Little was known of Sierra Leone and how it connect to the diamonds we own. ” These are lyrics from a recent song by popular hip-hop artist Kanye West regarding the human rights violations in Sierra Leone. Most people walk into jewelers around the world and drop thousands of dollars on diamond-studded jewelry without knowing the conflict behind their purchase. Fueled by the West’s desire for diamonds, wars raged in Sierra Leone over the rights to mine these precious stones for profit, causing deprivation and the displacement of innocent citizens and forcing children to take arms.

Background of Sierra Leone Sierra Leone is and always has been socially and economically underdeveloped. Diamonds account for fifty percent of the country’s exports, making the diamond industry the most profitable industry in Sierra Leone (Conflict Diamonds). As a former British colony, English is the national language of Sierra Leone, even though only 30% of its citizens are literate. Aside from a lack of education, sufficient healthcare is hard to come across in Sierra Leone. Like many other African nations, AIDS/HIV is a reoccurring problem.

Seven percent of the population is infected with AIDS/HIV and the average life expectancy in Sierra Leone is forty years old (Conflict Diamonds). Due to their minimal lifestyle, the people of Sierra Leone have always been susceptible to human rights violations. The Civil War in Sierra Leone: Causes The main cause of human rights violations in Sierra Leone was a tragic, ongoing civil war in Sierra Leone. According to UN figures, corruption within the diamond sector forced Sierra Leone to become the poorest country in the world before the outbreak of the war (The Civil War in Sierra Leone).

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Without a significant source of income, the government had very little control of operations within the country. This allowed for the trafficking of weapons, ammunition and drugs. The trafficking of such items diminished the national security of Sierra Leone and increased crime between Sierra Leone and neighboring Liberia and Guinea (The Civil War in Sierra Leone). Poor living conditions in Sierra Leone resulted in many citizens who were unhappy with the government. In 1991, the Revolutionary United Front formed under the leadership of a former Sierra Leone Corporal, Foday Sankoh.

The Revolutionary United Front took on the motto, “ No More Slaves, No More Masters. Power and Wealth to the People”(Revolutionary United Front). The goal of the Revolutionary United Front was to take over the government of Sierra Leone. The Revolutionary United Front was believed to be supported by Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, who wanted to destabilize Sierra Leone in order to gain control of its lucrative diamond industry (Sierra Leone Civil War). With a common goal of controlling the diamond industry of Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front and Charles Taylor began a devastating civil war in Sierra Leone.

The Civil War in Sierra Leone: Effects After training and supplying in Liberia, the Revolutionary United Front began its campaign from Liberia into Sierra Leone in March of 1991 (The Civil War in Sierra Leone). It wasn't long before refugees were forced to flee the country. After experiencing the brutality of the Revolutionary United Front, 107, 000 civilians fled to nearby Guinea within the first four months following the Revolutionary United Front invasion (The Civil War in Sierra Leone).

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It wasn't long before the Revolutionary United Front obtained significant power in Sierra Leone. In less than a year, they captured the city of Kono, the diamond mining capital of Sierra Leone (Brown). After obtaining millions of dollars worth of diamonds, the Revolutionary United Front used its relations with Liberian president, Charles Taylor, to enter the diamonds in the global market (Brown). Profits from the sale of diamonds were used to purchase weapons.

Diamonds became a necessity to the Revolutionary United Front because they solely financed the obtaining of weapons to lead their rebellion. First Opposition to the Revolutionary United Front and Effects The first major opposition to Revolutionary United Front forces arose shortly after the takeover of Kono. The National Provisional Ruling Council was the first to become involved in the war against the Revolutionary United Front in an attempt to stabilize the region (Brown). The attempt to drive out the Revolutionary United Front was unsuccessful.

In response to the National Ruling Council opposition, the Revolutionary United Front began a cruel attack on civilians of Sierra Leone during the 1996 elections. The Revolutionary United front began to chop off the hands and feet of people of all ages as an attempt to intimidate potential voters (Brown). In the fairness of democracy, the Revolutionary United Front became a legitimate political party after the signing of a peace treaty by the president of Sierra Leone (Brown). The signing of the peace treaty resulted in anything but peace.

The president of Sierra Leone at the time, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, made a terrible mistake. The Revolutionary United Front eventually formed the Armed Forces Ruling Council which they later used to get rid of Kabbah (Brown). After gaining political power in Sierra Leone, human rights violations only began to intensify in the region. Brutality of the Revolutionary United Front The Revolutionary United Front used many tools of intimidation and torture to control the civilians of Sierra Leone. More than anything, the Revolutionary United Front needed manpower to back their movement.

It was too difficult to recruit men so the Revolutionary United Front turned to young boys to be trained for military action. According to the Partnership Africa Canada, " Only a fraction of Sierra Leone's young people joined the Revolutionary United Front of their own volition...(The vast majority) were children who were kidnapped, drugged, and forced to commit atrocities" (The Civil War in Sierra Leone). Children are easily influenced so the Revolutionary United Front took advantage of it. There are many accounts of young boys being forced to kill their parents or neighbors as a terror tactic.

It is believed that some abductees were abducted at such a young age and had been fighting for so long that they were unable to remember where they came from or even why they were fighting (The Civil War in Sierra Leone). Not only did they kidnap young boys to contribute to their military strength, but they also kidnapped girls. Girls were raped and used as sex slaves (The Civil War in Sierra Leone). It is no surprise that many people fled their homes in fear of abduction by the Revolutionary United Front.

By the end of the civil war, half of the population of Sierra Leone was displaced and more than two-thirds of its infrastructure destroyed (Brown). The country was left in ruins as a result of the lack of international intervention. As a result, more than fifty thousand people were killed by the Revolutionary United Front (Brown). The human rights violations were not going to stop on their own. Eventually, aid and intervention came but it came too late. Specific Accounts of Revolutionary United Front Brutality One of the most in depth and disturbing studies of human rights violations in Sierra Leone was conducted by Human Rights Watch.

In January and February of 2000, Human Rights Watch documented rebel abuses in the government-controlled Port Loko District. According to Human Rights Watch, " The abuses include fourteen cases of rape (including girls as young as 11 years old), 118 cases of abductions of villagers, and three murders, as well as several cases of mutilation, forced labor, massive looting, ambushes, and the training of child combatants (Focus on Human Rights: Civil War in Sierra Leone). " The time period of these abuses was supposed to be during the decline of the civil war but rebel abuses were not diminishing.

There are many first-hand accounts of rebel brutality throughout Sierra Leone. Hassan, a thirty-five year old man describes the abduction of his daughter and murder of his brother: At around 5: 00 pm I was with my children when about 60 of them in full uniform and with guns and RPG's surprised us. We all ran into the bushes and from where I was hiding I saw my sixteen year old daughter being dragged away by those people and

heard them shouting about President Tejan Kabbah not having given them what they wanted.

We fled to a displaced camp near Freetown with the rest of my family but because we didn't have enough to eat, my brothers, cousins and I decided to venture back to try to salvage some of what we'd planted and to see if it was safe to return. We went by canoe but were unfortunately caught from behind ??? the rebels had another canoe and they held us under gun point until we reached the shore. As we were arriving, one rebel shot my twenty-year-old brother Mani. He fell, wounded into the shallow water and as we jumped down to try to rescue him, the rebel yelled " Don't touch him.

Get up ??? I'm going to finish you. " And then he shot him at close range. Then another rebel came and grabbed my ten-year-old cousin who stated screaming " Don't let him kill me," but the rebel told us he wanted the boy. Then they ordered us to leave and said, " That body is going to rot here and if you ever came back to try and bury him, we'll kill you all. " Now we're displaced people with no fishing nets or boats. All I want is to see my daughter and to go back to our village. What kind of ceasefire, what kind of peace is this (Focus on Human Rights)?

National Intervention It wasn't until 1999 that other countries became involved in the civil war. On October 22 1999, the United Nations Security Council established the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone in an effort to maintain the aspects of a recent peace treaty signed by the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (Conflict Diamonds). In July

of 1999, the opposing forces signed the Lome Peace Agreement which required the elimination of hostilities (Conflict Diamonds).

The agreement came eight years after the start of the civil war and came with very little international intervention. It wasn't until 2002, however, that the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone became effective. In January of 2002, 17, 000 peace-keeping forces were sent to Sierra Leone to enforce disarmament and " to uphold the provisions of the Lome agreement (Brown). " The placement of peace-keeping forces came three years after the creation of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. By early 2002, tens of thousands of former Revolutionary United Front combatants were disarmed (Conflict Diamonds).

Eleven years after the start of the civil war, democracy and stability were finally restored in Sierra Leone. Regulation of Diamond Market and Effects
Aside from the placement of peace-keeping troops in Sierra Leone, the world intervened by the controlling of the purchase of conflict diamonds that funded the Revolutionary United Front. At one point during the civil war, an estimated eighty-five percent of the diamond industry in Sierra Leone was being controlled by the Revolutionary United Front (The Civil War in Sierra Leone).

A majority of these diamonds were being smuggled into neighboring Liberia to be sold and traded for weapons. The United Nations recognized the benefits of diamond sales for the Revolutionary United Front and eventually passed restrictions on the sale of conflict diamonds. On July 5th, 2000, the United Nations Security Council banned direct and indirect imports of Sierra

Leone's conflict diamonds (Conflict Diamonds). The ban involved all member states of the United Nations and required a Certificate of Origin for the sale of every diamond from Sierra Leone (The Civil War in Sierra Leone). The United Nations ban on conflict diamonds from Sierra Leone directly and indirectly ended the funding of Revolutionary United Front military movements. The Kimberly Process Even though the United Nations' ban on conflict diamonds lowered the sale of such diamonds, it did not eliminate the sales of conflict diamonds. Even after the ban, it is estimated that four percent of diamond sales from Sierra Leone were considered conflict diamonds (Conflict Diamonds).

Four percent seems like a small number but it was still enough to fund Revolutionary United Front's crimes against civilians. In July of 2000, the global diamond industry decided to get more involved in the enforcement of its zero tolerance policy towards the sale of conflict diamonds. Along with the United Nations, governments, and non-governmental organizations, the diamond industry created the Kimberly Process Certification System (Conflict Diamonds). Under this process, mines immediately transport diamonds to Government Diamond Offices where the source is verified to ensure it is conflict free.

Each diamond is then placed in a tamper-resistant container and given a Kimberly Process Certificate with a unique serial number. All of this is approved by the government. After approval by Government Diamond Offices, the diamonds can only be imported by one of the seventy-one Kimberly Process countries (Conflict Diamonds). The Kimberly Process Certification System has become an efficient way to eliminate the sales of

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rough diamonds. Fifty-two nations ratified the Kimberly Process Certification System in November of 2002.

Currently, seventy-one governments are involved in the Kimberly Process Certification System and control over ninety-nine percent of the global production of potential conflict diamonds (Conflict Diamonds). After the end of the civil war in Sierra Leone, the global diamond industry strongly encouraged Sierra Leone to join the Kimberly Process Certification System. The global diamond industry eventually helped the Sierra Leone Ministry of Mines to set up a Government Diamond Office by helping with training and other forms of assistance (Conflict Diamonds).

After the establishment of a Government Diamond Office, Sierra Leone joined the Kimberly Process Certification System in 2003. Since the joining of the Kimberly Process Certification System, Sierra Leone has reduced its exportation of conflict diamonds to less than one percent (Conflict Diamonds). The reduction of the sale of conflict diamonds has significantly improved conditions in Sierra Leone. By reducing the sales of these diamonds, the global diamond industry has prevented the Revolutionary United Front from maintaining a significant military force.

Without consistent funding, the Revolutionary United Front strongly diminished after Sierra Leone joined the Kimberly Process Certification System. United Nations Indictments After stabilizing the region and beginning to regulate diamond trade, the United Nations finally began to indict those responsible for the civil war. The charges did not involve any accounts of genocide but rather “ indicted several of those involved in the

civil war in Sierra Leone for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and violations of international humanitarian law (Brown). The term genocide could not be applied to the actions of the Revolutionary United Front since they did not target a specific group of people but rather the civilians of Sierra Leone as a whole. It was undoubtedly a violation against humanity, though. In March of 2003, the Special Court for Sierra Leone, under the United Nations, summoned Foday Sankoh and several other Revolutionary United Front Leaders (Sierra Leone Civil War). Although the United Nations planned on indicting those responsible, some Revolutionary United Front leaders were able to escape into Liberia.

It wasn't until 2007 when the Special court for Sierra Leone convicted Revolutionary United Front leaders. In that year, only three of the eleven members in custody were convicted of “ war crimes, including acts of terrorism, collective punishments, extermination, murder, rape, outrages upon personal dignity, conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces, enslavement and pillage (Sierra Leone Civil War). The leader and founder of the Revolutionary United Front, Foday Sankoh, died of a heart attack before the convictions in prison on July 29, 2003 (Sierra Leone Civil War). Although there were several people responsible for the civil war in Sierra Leone and the resulting human rights violations of the war, only a select few were ever convicted. Not only did the United Nations and the international community get involved too late, but after discontinuing the war, nobody did much to prosecute the

Revolutionary United Front members who were responsible for the human rights violations. Modern Sierra Leone Present-day Sierra Leone is finally at <https://assignbuster.com/conflict-diamonds-assignment/>

peace. Democracy has been reestablished and the diamond industry booming once again. In 2005, Sierra Leone exported \$142 million worth of diamonds out of the country which is approximately 3% of the global diamond industry (Conflict Diamonds). After the adoption of the Kimberly Process, it is assured that all the diamonds exported were conflict-free.

As a result of the revenues from diamond exports, Sierra Leone is beginning to rebuild itself after its prolonged civil war. Conclusion and After-thoughts In the modern-day world, it is evident that money results in power. In Sierra Leone, money is represented by its lucrative diamond industry. Control of such a profitable industry in Sierra Leone would result in national power and representation in the government. As a result, some people would do anything to gain control of the diamond industry.

For almost ten years, the Revolutionary United Front tried to do so with the goal of controlling the nation through the control of the nation's diamond industry. As a result, many innocent civilians paid the price for the ruthless rebels. While the international community sat back and watched, thousands of people suffered so that the Revolutionary United Front could gain power of the diamond industry to be funded by the West's desire for diamonds.