

## **Leaders of diamond-fuelled terror campaign convicted by Sierra Leone's Special Court**

Global Witness welcomes the Special Court for Sierra Leone's conviction yesterday of three senior commanders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

During eleven years of civil war, the RUF waged a devastating campaign of terror against Sierra Leone's population, which it financed via the trade in conflict diamonds. The RUF's tactics included mass murder, rape and the systematic amputation of victims' limbs. By the time the movement laid down its arms in 2002, tens of thousands of Sierra Leoneans had been killed.

"These verdicts are a chilling reminder of how the trade in diamonds and other natural resources has underwritten some of the worst war crimes of the past two decades," said Global Witness Campaigner Mike Davis. "Yet despite cases such as Sierra Leone, there is still no comprehensive international approach to this problem. Natural resources continue to fuel conflict to this day, notably in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where armed groups are financing themselves through the trade in minerals and committing atrocities against the civilian population."

The three RUF commanders convicted, Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao, were directly involved in a joint criminal enterprise with former Liberian president Charles Taylor to take control of the diamond fields in eastern Sierra Leone. Having seized the mines, the RUF forced kidnapped civilians to dig for diamonds, which its commanders then traded for military and financial support.

In response to the diamond-fuelled wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola and Congo, governments, NGOs and the diamond industry established the international Kimberley Process to regulate the trade in rough diamonds and prevent diamonds from financing conflict. While the Kimberley Process has made considerable progress in helping to prevent the trade in conflict diamonds, the scheme still has significant loopholes which must be closed to ensure that a diamond-fuelled war, like Sierra Leone's, cannot happen again.

"Diamond mining continues to finance rebel activities in northern Ivory Coast, and the trade in illicit diamonds – diamonds bought and sold outside of Kimberley Process controls – is increasing globally," said Mike Davis. "Governments and the diamond industry must live up to their promise and make Kimberley Process controls more robust, if the scheme is to fulfil its mandate and curtail the threat of conflict diamonds."

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**Notes to editors**

1. Global Witness exposes the corrupt exploitation of natural resources and international trade systems to drive campaigns that end impunity, resource-linked conflict, and human rights and environmental abuses. Global Witness was co-nominated for the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize for its leading work on conflict diamonds and awarded the 2007 Commitment to Development Ideas in Action Award, sponsored jointly by Washington DC based Center for Global Development and Foreign Policy magazine. For more information, please see [www.globalwitness.org](http://www.globalwitness.org).
2. The Special Court for Sierra Leone was set up jointly by the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations. It is mandated to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996. For further information, see <http://www.sc-sl.org/>. Yesterday the Court convicted Issa Sesay and Morris Kallon of 16 counts and Augustine Gbao on 14 counts out of an 18-count indictment charging them with committing with atrocities committed during the country's civil war.
3. Charles Taylor is currently on trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague, facing 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.
4. For further information on Global Witness's findings on the involvement of armed groups and the Congolese army in the mineral trade in eastern DRC, see "Control of mines by warring parties threatens peace efforts in eastern Congo" (10 September 2008), available at [http://www.globalwitness.org/media\\_library\\_detail.php/663/en/control\\_of\\_mines](http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/663/en/control_of_mines).
5. The Kimberley Process (KP) is a government-led rough diamond certification created to halt and prevent the trade in conflict diamonds that led to the death and displacement of millions of people in Angola, Sierra Leone, DRC, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Member states are required to pass national legislation and set up an import/export control system to implement the KP. Over 75 of the world's diamond producing, trading and manufacturing countries participate in the scheme.

