

Swiss church group urges 'don't buy Zimbabwean diamonds'



Marlon Zakeyo. Photo © Peter Kenny / ENInews

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Geneva (ENInews). The Swiss church-backed group Bread for All says numerous human rights violations are being committed in certain Zimbabwe's diamond mines by State security forces and the minerals should be labelled "blood diamonds".

Bread for All (Switzerland) is calling on the government of Switzerland, as a member of the Kimberley Process, to demand the exclusion of certain Zimbabwean diamonds tainted by links to human rights' violation from international trade.

Marlon Zakeyo, who heads the Zimbabwe Advocacy Office in Geneva, told *ENInews*, "Switzerland is an important jewellery centre, but it is also known as a country that is a centre for human rights. The Swiss government is also a key partner in the Kimberley Process, which deals with international diamond trading."

The Swiss group, which works with the Zimbabwe office, is also urging consumers in

Switzerland to seek advice on the origin of diamonds before buying them and to refuse to buy certain diamonds from Zimbabwe, a country where severe human rights violations take place.

Zakeyo said that Bread for All is calling on the Swiss government to expand the Kimberley Process, which is designed to certify the origin of rough diamonds in order to combat "blood diamonds", or stones that serve to finance wars of rebel groups against governments.

Bread for All says, "The definition of blood diamonds should be broadened to include stones originating from areas where human rights violations are committed by government forces."

Zakeyo, a Geneva-based Zimbabwean lawyer, said, "Diamond trading should also not benefit the military or political elite, but the communities who live in the vicinity of the diamond fields."

Bread for All is the development service of the Protestant churches in Switzerland and it supports about 350 development projects and programmes in 55 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It lobbies governmental authorities, Switzerland's parliament and the country's economic sector for a more equitable and sustainable development framework.

Zakeyo explained that Zimbabwe is one of the world's biggest producers of rough diamonds, most of which are found in the country's eastern Marange district.

The Zimbabwe Advocacy Office, which is a partner of Bread for All, reported that several human rights violations have been committed in the southern African country's diamond mines by State security forces, which are under the control of President Robert Mugabe.

Human Rights Watch had reported that in October 2008, Zimbabwe's government deployed its army to control the Marange region and during this military operation more than 200 miners and villagers were killed.

Since the installation of the military around the diamond fields, human rights are being committed frequently, notably, forced labour, child labour, torture, beatings and abductions. In addition, soldiers are reportedly forcing miners to work for them and smuggle diamonds, said Bread for All.

In November 2009, the Kimberly Process suspended the sale of Marange diamonds. In July 2010, after two missions of enquiry, it judged Zimbabwe had met "the minimum criteria of the certification process for selling its uncut diamonds", since diamond sales do not finance rebel groups.

Zimbabwe was therefore authorised to hold a first diamond auction to international buyers in August 2010. However, Rapaport, a leading diamond brokerage company based

in the United States, announced it would not purchase Marange diamonds due to their connection with serious human rights violations.

Bread for All noted that, "Currently the production of diamonds is not going towards national development as the diamond trade is being controlled by an army under the heel of President Mugabe. This situation is all the more alarming in that Zimbabwe suffers from widespread hunger and a severe economic crisis."