



Opening speech by Stephane Fischler at the Kimberley Process Plenary 2018

Excellencies,
Dear KP Chair,
Chair of the various KP working groups.
Members of the Civil Society, DDI, ADPA
Dear Participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

There should have been two more people in this room today, but sadly Robert Fowler and David Angell could not be with us. These two Canadian diplomats were instrumental in creating this process. I am sure they would remind us why we are here.

And why have we been gathering together twice a year, for the past 15 years? We have been doing so to look in at ourselves and measure how well or not we are performing.

We consistently need to remind ourselves that we have the ability, through this process and by consensus, to make a difference in the present and future lives of people residing in some of the most challenged member-countries assembled here today.

This is the voice of the diamond industry.

There is a Kimberley Process today because we, among a very small group of people, came forward when confronted with the horrors of civil war. We came forward because the very product that has enriched so many lives was being abused to fuel a fight that cared little about human cost.

A few good men and women, each from their own position, made it happen. And they contributed to the ending of immense human suffering. It was suffering that left scars that should never be hidden.

This diamond industry, today knows.

We know what happened then, but more importantly we know what must happen now.

And what must happen, just like it did 15 years ago, is that we use the power provided to us through our unique spirit of consensus to eliminate other causes of human suffering, in addition to civil rebellions.

What we need to work towards now is ensuring that the poorest of the communities under our purview, the artisanal diamond miners, cease to be totally dependent, abused, and denied a future unlike all the other workers in the diamond industry.

We need to make certain that the environment in which they reside, be maintained in such a way so that it remains livable, providing them with fertile soil and clean water that is necessary to sustain basic nourishment and to thrive.

We need to make certain that that no private security force will think it can act with impunity in systematically abusing miners and their families.

We need to make certain that government forces, when confronted with a mission to restore order, even in very challenging situations, will do so with proportionate force, and without brute and systematic abuse.

This is the voice of the diamond industry.

Other threats are facing us today.

In a recent FT article, that I shared with some of you a couple of weeks ago, which was titled “Big miners need to reinvent themselves”, the CEO of one of the largest mining companies, Rio Tinto, said the following, and I quote: “As we speak there are scientists from Boston to Perth, inventing materials to replace those that are mined today”.

This industry did not have to wait for this gentleman’s comment to know it’s here. Synthetics, the cheap and becoming cheaper chemically perfect replica is here. And even if you haven’t seen or touched one yet, they are in this room staring at us today together with the artisanal miners and their families.

As we well know, gem-quality diamonds are non-essential products. But in a good number of places, many in countries represented in this room, the industry that produces diamonds is an essential part of the economy and the national fabric. We cannot allow reputational shortcomings to threaten the livelihoods of millions of people, especially when consumers are being led to believe that they have synthetic alternatives. Diamonds mined from the earth have a social, as well as an economic purpose. Synthetics are purely profit driven. We need to defend that distinction.

More than 90% of the world’s diamonds are recovered overwhelmingly by public companies that report annually not only on their financial but also on their social and environmental performance. This is an industry-wide project that has shown solid and continuous improvement, ensuring good working conditions, awareness of the needs of the environment and a future filled with hope rather than despair for all those involved.

Why then can we not do the same for the other 10%, those coming from artisanal mining communities and maintain the duty of trust owed to consumers and ensuring that these diamonds are ethically sourced as well?

Despair, lack of choice, and a future that mirrors their past, is the daily reality and challenge facing the artisanal diamond workers and their families.

We cannot abandon these people, who account for the remaining 5 to 10 percent of the value of rough diamond production.

We need to put in more effort and push for the current reform process to succeed. We call it reform and not review, because we have had many reviews with so little meaningful return.

Dear KP members, It is now time to care – to seriously care – and to do so by taking action.

We must show care for the 1,5 million individuals, overwhelmingly Africans, who look at their counterparts working at Alrosa, Catoca, De Beers, Dominion, Petra and Rio Tinto and probably think, “Hey, we’re digging for diamonds too, but what is our reward?” When you take their families into consideration, they number about 10 million people.

A lack of care and an absence of meaningful reform is pushing millions to despair, and that, once again, produces all the ingredients required for an unending cycle of violence.

Unless national and local governments create or stimulate alternative means of livelihood, you can wish them away as long as you want. But they are staying right where they are. They will remain there with their misery, as steady as their picks and shovels.

Let us heed the words of Mrs. Graça Machel, Chair of the African Child Policy Forum, who recently warned that “a toxic combination of poor nutrition and lack of education poses a major threat to future peace and prosperity”.

And true, it is tough, very tough. And yes, these are some of the poorest countries on earth. But we can make a difference.

By focusing on real and lasting change, based on fairness and justice, with the commitment not only of countries and their leaders, but also international institutions and business investors, we can finally make good on our promises.

Promises, like all those contained in the international treaties that have been designed, and signed by all of you, guarantee the protection of human lives, and in particular those of women and children, and lay out what constitute fair labor conditions.

Just last September in Zambia, the Mosi-oa-Tunya Declaration on Artisanal and Small-scale Mining, Quarrying and Development was concluded.

My dear KP members, you know better than anyone, what it is that you have signed.

The only way to have a fair division of responsibility to ensure appropriate protection and care, is to strengthen and increase the effectiveness of the Kimberley Process.

We must provide it with the proper tools to act effectively. We must expand the definition of “conflict diamonds” from what it is today.

It must focus on all rough diamonds, and must cover The issues that we face today.

Together with the Coalition of NGOs representing Civil Society and Canada, we sent last week a joint proposal for expanding the conflict diamonds definition for consideration to the Kimberley Process.

The effort to defend the position of natural diamonds as a unique product category is also essential. We call on all KP members to work together with WDC in its effort to ensure the creation of different and distinctive HS customs codes for natural diamonds and synthetics, and to implement the International Diamond Terminology Guidelines. To achieve our social and economic goals, we first need to protect the viability of our product, without which nothing will be possible.

We must find it within ourselves to break away from the mindset of “if we still need to strengthen our current standards, how can we even think about expanding our scope?”

Our reply to that is: “How can we even think of not using this reform opportunity to strengthen the diamond equity.

Our industry can improve itself, but only together with you, can we drive change.

In support of the KP, the diamond industry has strengthened its own System of Warranties. They now include clear references to international Human Rights treaties, International Labor Organization standards and “last-but-not-least”, the OECD due diligence guidelines.

These voluntary guidelines are designed to further raise the awareness of the “do no harm” principle, using due diligence to ensure a more sustainable and ethical supply chain including for these last 5-10% worth of production.

The message that should come out of the meeting is that we are remaining engaged to enable change for the benefit of all, including, for the first time, the artisanal diamond mining communities.

We know it can be done. The principles and the first seeds are being planted by the Diamond Development Initiative and their Maendaleo Diamond Standards.

These are supported in part by the industry, not only financially but also through capacity building.

A great example among many was put together and financed by the Antwerp World Diamond Center, which recently organized one of many training courses for miners, in tandem with the DDI.

Another example is the De Beers Gemfair initiative.

Other industry trading centers and organizations are also committed to providing resources, as well as to driving change on the ground.

My dear participants, the diamond industry today is determined to strengthen this unique process that so many depend on.

Although we do not have a vote, we do have voice, and as always, it will be heard.

As the Chinese proverb says: “A single tree does not make a forest; a single string cannot make music.”

Ladies and gentlemen, KP members, now is the moment to act. Let’s act as we did 15 years ago. Together.

Thank you.



World Diamond Council President Stephane Fischler