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Editorials
Blood-diamond talks hint at Darfur solution

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The film "Blood Diamond," starring Leonardo DiCaprio, takes us back to war-ravaged Sierra Leone in the late 1990s, when that country's diamonds were used to finance rebel groups who fought against legitimate governments. This illicit diamond trade devastated the country, and these traded diamonds consequently were named "blood diamonds."

This war was infamous for its brutality, especially for the maiming of children, which led to panic in the population and to their flight from Sierra Leone. In such wars, none of us can remain bystanders. This film shows action can be undertaken to end genocide or war, as in Darfur. The civil war in Sierra Leone killed more than 50,000 people, displaced over one-third of the country's 4.5 million people, and drove more than 500,000 to neighboring countries.

The film revealed the way to cut financing of the conflict. Once the world became aware in the 1990s of the importance of blood diamonds for financing the civil war in Sierra Leone, the United Nations, governments, NGOs and the diamond industry came together to end the illicit trade in blood diamonds used in the civil war. The fight against blood diamonds urgently demanded the world community ban blood diamonds and ensured that only clean diamonds came to the market.

The U.N. Security Council imposed a ban on the importation of Sierra Leonean diamonds. The South African government convened at Kimberley a unique grouping of governments, diamond industry leaders as well as interested NGOs, which became the "Kimberley Process," named for the largest diamond mine. The goal was to create an internationally recognized certificate of origin for "clean diamonds" that would protect both the diamond exporting countries and the industry so that customers can be certain that they are not buying blood-tainted diamonds that may have helped finance war in Sierra Leone, Angola, Liberia or elsewhere. The United States enacted the Clean Diamond Trade Act in 2003.

By last year, 56,791 shipments of rough diamonds were controlled. The Kimberley Process ban on blood diamonds was a long step forward to end war in Sierra Leone and help in its reconstruction. Last year alone, Sierra Leone exported nearly \$200 million in "clean" rough diamonds.

EU President Angela Merkel and President Bush should take the lead to stop the genocide in Darfur. The war is driven by ethnic and regional tensions between Arabs in the north and black Africans in the south. The Sufi Islamic government and its Janjaweed militia are engaged in combat with animistic Christian rebels in the South.

The "Blood Diamond" movie shows us that action, rather than more high-sounding-but-empty pronouncements, is needed to halt genocide. Action to stop genocide can take many forms: remembrance of earlier genocides, education to respect human dignity, sanctions to cut off funding for atrocities, and military intervention.

The importance of oil in Sudan reminds us of Sierra Leone. Oil has the same importance for the genocide in Darfur as diamonds did for the civil war in Sierra Leone. China is fulfilling its oil needs with "Blood Oil" from Sudan; China is the most important customer for the Khartoum regime. The African Union threatens to intervene but has not.

The U.N. convention on genocide alone requires signatories to seek to prevent and punish the crime of genocide. Nevertheless, conflicting interests in the pursuit of human rights, counterterrorism and trade have stymied efforts by a global coalition of human rights activists, security specialists, U.S. Christian groups and governments to stop the Sudanese government's atrocities.

What is to be done? First, African Union forces must be reinforced by U.N. or NATO forces. Second, governments can impose financial control sanctions on foreign firms conducting business in Sudan. Third, the International Criminal Court can begin proceedings against the perpetrators. Leadership from the United States and the European Union by Bush and Merkel can influence the Chinese. China has the influence in Khartoum to help negotiate a peace agreement that would dismantle the Janjaweed militias.

In the last scene in the "Blood Diamond" movie, the victim of the war in Sierra Leone stands before the world and tells his story, the story of genocide. So often has the international community said: "Never again." So often we have witnessed more genocide. It is possible to end the murder in Darfur, if we want to do so. Do we?

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