

*International Moral Obligation Towards Sierra Leone in Light of Conflict Diamonds*

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## Introduction

*“World poverty is much larger and much smaller than we had thought. It kills one-third of all human beings born into our world. And its eradication would require no more than 1 percent of the global product”*

- Thomas Pogge, 2008

Despite the progress in norms, values and morality of Western civilization (such as the outlaw of slavery, colonialism, and genocide), severe and widespread poverty continues to exist while there is great and rising affluence elsewhere (Pogge 2). This severe poverty continues at a great level due to the fact that individuals in more affluent countries are removed from the situation to a degree that we, as a whole, do not seem to find its eradication morally compelling. Granted, certain extreme situations such as terrible tragedies of nature and certain instances of mass genocide are sometimes found troubling enough to warrant serious moral reflection and, at times, positive action to alleviate the situation. However, the millions of lives that are lost to extreme poverty across the globe are not often regarded with the attention of those in power.

There are a variety of reasons for this apathy, at least one of which is the tendency to view the eradication of such poverty as a futile task too great to accomplish. Additionally, persons residing in relatively more affluent countries are able to distance themselves physically and mentally from the problem of global poverty: they tend to view themselves as disconnected from the millions of lives that are suffering across the globe. However, through utilizing the works of Thomas Pogge, I will argue that affluent nations are not as disconnected from the global poor as one would often like to presume. In fact, there are situations in which the global poor are harmed due to a social order that is sustained by international institutions.

Circumstances as such constitute a violation of negative duties. An important example of such a case is the country of Sierra Leone. Due to the harm that affluent nations have afflicted upon this impoverished county, international institutions hold moral obligations towards the fulfillment of human rights within Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone, a country located in western Africa with a population of approximately 6.9 million people, is facing issues of severe poverty. The 2009 Human Development Report ranks Sierra Leone as the third-lowest (180<sup>th</sup> out of 182) country on its Human Development Index, which measures countries' average achievement in the dimensions of life expectancy, education, and standard of living. This is a slight improvement: in the years prior, Sierra Leone ranked dead last. As of 2007, only 38% of adults in Sierra Leone were recorded to be literate and the average life expectancy at birth was approximated to be 47.3 years. Ironically, Sierra Leone is rich in natural resources. In particular, the country is often noted for its abundance of diamonds. However, due to a variety of factors including corruption and a civil war led by rebels who wreaked havoc upon civilians, these resources do not transfer into wealth for most Sierra Leoneans. Quite to the contrary, diamonds (small pieces of carbon with no great *intrinsic* value) have been a key causal factor of widespread death, destruction, and misery among the civilians residing in Sierra Leone.

So, what does a case such as Sierra Leone imply in regards to moral obligations that ought to be considered by more affluent nations around the globe? There are a few steps that have to be taken in order to accomplish the task of answering this question. First, we have to create and examine our personal theories

of international moral obligations towards human rights violations. Second, we have to theoretically apply this approach to our particular case. Third, we have to consider the practical implications of the moral responsibility that has been established. The aim of this paper is to accomplish these three tasks in relation to the current situation of poverty faced by Sierra Leone.

### **Conception of Basic Human Rights**

According to Thomas Pogge, basic human rights are not fulfilled for half of the global population. In order to assess this claim, it is necessary to conceptualize a definition of a basic human right. I adopt Henry Shue's notion that a right is not seen as basic simply because it is more valuable or enjoyable than other rights; rather, a right is basic when that particular right has to be secured before a person can be able to exercise other types of rights which allows her to live a fuller life.

When classifying a right as basic, the main concern is not whether this right holds the most intrinsic value. Regardless, intrinsically valuable rights can be enjoyed only when basic rights are enjoyed. Shue identifies the two basic rights of physical security and subsistence (which includes minimal economic security). Without these two conditions, a person is not free to pursue other aspects of life. They are essential components of enjoying, say, a right to an assembly or a right to pursue happiness (Shue 25).

Expanding off of Shue's arguments, I conceive basic human rights as the minimally adequate level of access to goods that foster the capacity within individuals to pursue well-being, to function at a sufficient level, and to participate

in the society within which they live. These goods include: subsistence goods (such as food, water, and clothing), physical security, a basic level of education and a minimal level of health. I consider these rights to be basic, because without the fulfillment of these particular rights, individuals cannot pursue further rights. For example, if a person is starving, he or she is so focused upon obtaining food that he or she is unable to perform most other actions.

The notion of a basic right implies an entitlement. Therefore, due to basic rights, each individual generates a certain demand: the demand for the fulfillment of that right. To have a right is to be in a position to make demands of others.

However, questions remain about the scope of to whom and for whom the burden of fulfilling the duty of supplying these basic rights falls upon. Should there be limits in obtaining these goals, and what ought these limits be? There are a variety of viewpoints regarding international obligation towards the global poor.

### **Three Theories of International Moral Obligation**

#### *State-Centric*

State-centric views are those that claim that a nation's obligation toward the fulfillment of basic human rights falls primarily or solely upon the government within which human rights are violated. A distinguishing trait of nationalism is the mentality that citizens and governments may, and perhaps should, show more concern for their own state than for foreign states. In other words, 'we should fix our problems at home before we focus our attention abroad'. Due to community and shared values, one's loyalties to and obligations toward the needy ought to

begin with those who live within one's society. Extension of these duties to other individuals is contingent upon primarily satisfying the needs of one's fellow citizens. Moral commitments arise out of the community of one's nation: this ought not be extended to a greater scope. Thus, individuals holding this view would not support foreign efforts in Sierra Leone.

'Patriotic nationalism' views are generally associated with strong commitments to a nation conceived as "a community of persons bound together by a shared history or culture" (Pogge 124). Such a sense of commitment arises out of a patriotic mentality. Alasdair MacIntyre holds that patriotism, defined as "a kind of loyalty to a particular nation which one those possessing that particular nationality can exhibit" (MacIntyre 44), is a virtue. Such patriotism recognizes the merits, characters, and achievements of one's nation. It entails a reciprocal relationship of gratitude between and individual and one's country. Patriotism often leads to a strong sense of community within one's nation and thus to the justification of the prioritization of the fulfillment of the basic rights of individuals within one's country before the fulfillment of the basic rights of foreign persons. This mentality is a key component to Nationalism.

In general, Nationalist theories may justify a lack of support towards foreign efforts towards Sierra Leone in two ways: solely applying blame for human rights violations upon local government corruption, or viewing that efforts to alleviate foreign poverty are futile. However, I reject both of these claims.

One could plausibly rationalize the civil war conflict in Sierra Leone with a state-centric theory of corruption. This explanation would claim that the civil war

and poverty within this country was solely caused by corruption within the elite groups of this nation. This corruption arises out of the culture, traditions and practices of Sierra Leone; therefore, its consequences are 'out of our hands', so to speak. In fact, dumping resources into the hands of the leaders of Sierra Leone would prove futile. Actions to alleviate poverty would be mediated by variables rooted within the state.

However, this state-centric explanation for the conflicts faced in Sierra Leone is not sufficient to unveil the causal factors that have led to the poverty prevalent within the country. Oftentimes, theorists are quick to highlight national causal factors without considering the point that these local conditions are encouraged and sustained by central aspects of the present global order. Although poverty is often substantially caused by corrupt national economic regimes, this analysis is ultimately unsatisfactory, because it explains these occurrences as an exogenous fact: a fact that explains but is not itself explained (Pogge 117). An explanation is also needed for this prevalence. Thus, it does not necessarily follow from the fact of corrupt elite existing within a nation that global factors do not play a large role in causing the poverty that evolved and is sustained in these regions.

A state-centric theory may also claim that we ought not pour our resources into efforts to alleviate poverty in Sierra Leone, because such efforts are futile. One could even reference past failures in other corrupt African countries, such as our unsuccessful bout in Somalia. However, such mentalities often arise out of viewing the global poor as a homogenous mass. It is important to recognize that "saving ten children from a painful death by hunger does make a real difference, *all* the

difference for these children, and that this difference is quite significant even when many other children remain hungry” (Pogge 8). When assessing human rights, we ought to consider each person at the unit of the individual, rather than the units of groups or nations.

### *Cosmopolitanism*

In contrast to the nationalist assertion that fellow patriots ought to receive priority in one’s consideration of his duties to others, cosmopolitans such as Henry Shue argue that it is not plausible to settle the magnitudes of one’s duties in justice toward fellow members of one’s nation-state prior to and independent of settling the magnitude of one’s duties in justice towards nonmembers (Shue 605).

Cosmopolitanism breaks the duties of morality outside the bounds of nationalism.

Three elements that are shared by all cosmopolitan positions include: individualism, universality, and generality. In other words, the unit of concern is the individual, applied to each individual equally and globally.

Because of this consideration at the level of the individual, it is argued that one cannot combine ‘agnosticism’ about international justice with knowledge about domestic duties of justice. A concept of ‘we’ as a nation opposed to ‘them’ throughout the world is seen as rather arbitrary. Regardless of one’s place of residence, each person is entitled to the fulfillment of certain basic rights. Additionally, everyone is entitled to the removal of the most serious conditions that could interfere with or prevent the exercise of these rights. A right as such provides “(1) the rational basis for a justified demand (2) that the actual enjoyment of a



substance be (3) socially guaranteed against standard threats” (Shue 13). The demand to the fulfillment of this social guarantee can be made on a global scale, because it is the right of each individual in this world, regardless of where he or she was born.

Shue claims that everyone has both positive and negative duties to fulfill each person’s basic rights. Shue holds that avoiding the violation of someone’s rights by refraining from acting in any of the ways that would constitute a violation is not sufficient. In fact, “it is impossible to protect anyone’s rights to, [for example], physical security without taking, or making payments toward to taking of, a wide range of positive actions.

Individuals holding this version of Cosmopolitanism would support foreign efforts towards alleviating poverty in Sierra Leone. Although I agree with this claim, I also reject traditional cosmopolitanism, due to the fact that it does not establish limits and priorities about where our international duties lie. It seems too idealistic and broad in scope. Therefore, I turn to a moderation of cosmopolitanism offered by philosopher Thomas Pogge.

### *Thomas Pogge’s Approach*

Although Pogge holds that positive duties arise when institutions have been inflicted harm upon persons, his emphasis lies with our negative duties *not* to harm those with which we have a relationship. These moral duties hold more weight. For example, one would consider it a greater duty *not* to kill another human being than to *positively* intercept the death of another in order to prevent his being killed.

Pogge also asserts that human rights can only be violated when this deficit can be causally traced to social *institutions*. This is a weighty claim, because it implies that although individuals can cause great harm to other persons, they cannot create human rights deficits. This burden lies in the power of institutions.

'Harm' is not necessarily defined as making persons worse-off than they would be without this established relationship. If there exists a circumstance in which a global order is causing misery to individuals, albeit at a declining rate (perhaps there is less harm currently invoked than 50 years ago), this order is harming individuals. So, a concept of harm cannot be comparative with a previous time period. This sort of definition would be arbitrary. Rather, "an institutional order harms people when its design can be defined unjust by reference to a feasible

alternative design" (Pogge 25). When an institutional design *foreseeably* produces an *avoidable* human rights deficit, this institutional design is unjust. These

conditions of social justice are applied on a global scale for the simple reason that it is not *practical* to treat each institution as separate within our current global order.

The interdependencies of countries around the world are of great significance and cannot be ignored. Institutional interconnection in the contemporary world causes human lives to be profoundly impacted by non-domestic social institutions. These types of relationships create moral obligations towards individuals residing in other nations. It is not that we are obligated to help the global poor out of mere altruism; rather, the global poor need help in great part due to the terrible injustices that affluent countries have been inflicting upon them. Thus, our duties toward

exploited individuals of other countries arise out of the strong negative duty to stop harming others.

Our current global order is unjust, because it causes great harm to the poor through two avenues: affluent governments have a huge advantage in bargaining power and expertise, and our representative in international negotiations do not consider the interests of the global poor as part of their mandate. Rather, they seek out the highest level of profit and the best interests of the corporations in their own country. This set-up creates exploitation and harsh results for impoverished individuals of other countries (Pogge 26).

It is important to note that Pogge is not suggesting that affluent countries ought to impose values and lifestyles upon individuals of other cultures. Rather, his core criterion in establishing international justice is rather modest. He envisions a global system that does not interfere with each person acquiring the goods necessary to develop and realize a conception of a personally and ethically worthwhile life (Pogge 43).

The problems of global poverty seem vast, yet they are not unconquerable. These issues become more mentally accessible and plausible when we look at specific cases of countries facing severe poverty. This allows us to cease viewing the global poor as a homogenous mass and to begin understanding situations faced by individuals within individual nation. When examining specific cases, it becomes apparent that our considerations about international moral obligations are both important and relevant, because they determine our reactions to problems faced around the globe.

I adopt Thomas Pogge's approach to international moral obligations as being applicable and just. So, if we are to adopt his theory, we will establish that international institutions have a moral obligation toward Sierra Leone if:

- (a) Individuals within this country are being harmed and their basic human rights are not being fulfilled
- (b) An international enterprise and/or the global order is in some way contributing to this human rights deficit
- (c) This human rights deficit is avoidable
- (d) This human rights deficit is foreseeable (Pogge 25-26).

The remainder of this paper examines the case of Sierra Leone in detail and argue that it fulfills each of these conditions; therefore, affluent nations that profited from the harm of individuals in Sierra Leone such as (among others) the US, United Kingdom, and Belgium hold a moral obligation towards fulfilling the basic human rights of Sierra Leoneans. These duties ought to be put into practice as soon as feasibly possible.

### **Sierra Leone**

*"I can only conclude that greed and corruption – local, regional, and global in scope – have encompassed Sierra Leone's diamond industry, and are the root cause of a conflict too long ignored"*

- Hon. Flora MacDonald, C.C., 2000

*"[In Freetown, Sierra Leone], there was no place to escape the walking, talking evidence of how bad and desperate a place Sierra Leone was. Freetown was a city filled with war-ravaged beggars and thieves. There were too many refugees and not enough humanitarian aid to go around. People crippled with polio staked out street corners, and tried to extort money from those passing within reach. Waiters would try*

*to sell you diamonds or offer to rent their sisters to you for weeks at a time. Children with bloated bellies scratched at the windows of downtown restaurants”*

- Greg Campbell, 2004

Corruption in countries is often encouraged and sustained by what Pogge deems the ‘International Resource Privilege’, defined as “the legal power to confer globally valid ownership rights in the country’s resources” (Pogge 119). These resources provide powerful incentives toward civil wars in resource-rich countries. This may explain the phenomenon of the correlation between poor countries holding resources and an increase of political corruption within these countries. It seems that a poor country’s high level of resources inhibits its progress toward economic growth and eradication of poverty. According to Pogge, this process depends on a global background factor. In the case of Sierra Leone, relationships with international global enterprises certainly spurred on a degradation of development. In order to better understand Sierra Leone’s situation, it will be useful to examine its recent history in regards to foreign relations and local civil wars. This will help shed light upon the international relationships that support harms of Sierra Leoneans, which prevent the fulfillment of basic human rights. The era of interest of Sierra Leone’s history begins, of course, with the discovery of diamonds. This international resource is high in value, small in size, and easy to smuggle. As a result, a land containing diamonds often proves to be a land of conflict.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is worthwhile to note that other African countries containing an abundance of diamond resources have faced similar problems of rebel groups and civil wars over the battle for this International Resource Privilege: countries such as Angola and The Republic of Congo.

*Historic Overview of Sierra Leone: 1930 – 1956*

Sierra Leone is a small country, about the size of South Carolina, on Africa's west coast, bordered by Guinea and Liberia. At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Portuguese explorers settled in this region in order to conduct a slave trade. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, British opponents of slavery established a community in a city that they deemed 'Freetown' in order to help former slaves resettle there (Ek 1). In 1808, Sierra Leone became a British colony, but the first diamond was not discovered in Sierra Leone until 1930 and significant production commenced in 1935, when colonial authorities made an agreement with De Beers' Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST), "giving the company exclusive mining and prospecting rights over the entire country for 99 years" (Smillie 6). De Beers certainly profited from this relationship: Sierra Leone (officially) mined approximately 55 million carats<sup>2</sup> of diamonds between 1930 and 1998. At an average price of a US \$270 per carat, Sierra Leone produced a value of approximately \$15 billion dollars for De Beers (Smillie 18).

However, controlling the resources within Sierra Leone's land with a monopoly proved to be rather difficult. After the end of World War II, Sierra Leoneans returned to their home country after serving in the British Army with the knowledge of the value of diamonds. Shortly thereafter, there was a boom in independent mining operators; of course, these operators were performing illegal activities, because only SLST had the rights to mine these diamonds. Regardless,

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<sup>2</sup> One carat is 0.20 grams

there were more than 30,000 illegal miners in 1954 who were supported by wealthy Lebanese financiers settled in the area (Campbell 19).

Furthermore, Sierra Leone is not an ideal mining environment. Although diamonds covered over a quarter of the country's land, the deposits were located in the heart of an unexplored jungle, scattered among and between remote villages. The diamonds were found along riverbeds, which meant that they had to be mined as 'alluvial diamonds'. Alluvial diamonds are collected over extended areas by a multitude of artisans using rudimentary technologies. Diamonds are collected in Sierra Leone through the use of 'sifters': devices that an individual creates out of shallow buckets, which are dipped into a riverbed, extracted and shaken in order to search for pieces of carbon gems hidden among dirt and gravel. These types of mining sites cannot be fenced and as a result controls are typically loose and ineffective. Therefore, the mining conditions exacerbated the general breakdown in law and order within the diamond realm of Sierra Leone.

In an effort to alleviate their struggle for control over diamonds, De Beers gave up their nation-wide monopoly of this resource and constricted their ownership to the regions of Yengema and Tongo Field (approximately 450 square miles in area). However, by 1956 there were still approximately 75,000 'illicit miners' in the Kono District (the heart of the diamond area), and the smuggling continued to become greater in scale. With the help of Saika Stevens, the minister of mines for Sierra Leone's government-elect, De Beers instituted the Diamond Corporation of Sierra Leone (DCSL), "a company that would buy diamonds from those who were at the time 'stealing' them from SLST and selling them in Monrovia,

the nearby capital of neighboring Liberia” (Campbell 20). The DCSL would then hand over the diamonds to the Diamonds Trading Company in London, which was part of the Central Selling Organization (CSO), another diamond funnel established by De Beers.

### *The Diamond Industry and De Beers*

A diamond typically goes through five stages of processing: the mining and purchasing of rough stone gems, the sorting of stones by quality, cutting and polishing, manufacturing, and marketing. The main problems involving conflict diamonds occur during the first stage; after this point, the ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ diamonds become mixed together, and it is difficult to distinguish the two.

Gemstone experts may be able to determine where each stone was located, but it is not easy. Once diamonds are cut and polished, it is virtually impossible to tell. So, it is the first stage of this process that holds the main players that ought to be held accountable for the purchasing of conflict diamonds. Enterprises that purchase such diamonds are either guilty of an insufficient amount of regulation, or of being aware that such atrocities are occurring, yet valuing the increased profits that take place because of them. In the case of conflict diamonds, it is evident that both of these situations were occurring the varying degrees. Some diamond purchasers were aware of the atrocities being performed in order to obtain rough stones, while others purposefully turned a blind eye to the entire situation. However, reports made this data available, and thus ignorance is not an acceptable excuse. By ignoring such data, agencies involved in the diamond enterprise were profiting from



resources produced at the cost of great harm inflicted upon residents of Sierra Leone.

De Beers plays a largely dominant role in the first two stages of diamond processing. “De Beers purchases by far the majority of all diamonds produced, and more or less sets the price of rough diamonds on the global market. Manipulation of both the supply and demand for rough diamonds on world markets is managed through its Central Selling Organization (CSO), headquartered in London” (Smillie 20). The CSO is in charge of sourcing diamonds from its own mines as well as purchases from the ‘outside market’. The CSO combines and packages rough gems from various locations. These diamonds are then sold to ‘sightholders’; most of whom reside in Antwerp, Belgium. Sightholders then take the diamonds and sell them to locations where they are cut and polished (Smillie 22). As previously discussed, De Beers monopolized diamond trade in Sierra Leone for a large portion of time, and continues to gather supplies from this country today.

#### *The Rise of the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone*

Sierra Leone gained independence in 1961, but Sierra Leoneans were not politically equipped to handle the political and economic tensions. As a result, democratic elections were to be continually interwoven with military coups and struggles for power over the diamond resources. One poor leader followed another, and by 1991, Sierra Leone was ripe for revolution. The government was headed by Joseph Momoh, who had inherited a “one-party government, a non-existent economy, and a highly agitated and disenfranchised citizenry from his doctoral predecessor, Saika Stevens” (Campbell 70). Sierra Leone was one of the poorest

countries in the world: electricity was sparse, medical facilities and schools barely existed, diseases plagued the land, and there was a great deal of unrest about the fact that wealthy foreign individuals controlled the diamond fields. The sentiment was one which questioned: if diamonds are as valuable as everyone says they are, then why aren't rural villagers benefiting from them, and why is there so much poverty throughout our country?

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) first entered Sierra Leone from Liberia (where they were trained by Liberian officials) in 1991 and captured various villages and districts. At first, the group was greeted as a potential relief and new leadership for the people of Sierra Leone. However, it was quickly evident that the RUF's agenda was not to support the locals. Rather than attempt to win the favor of the people, the RUF rampaged into villages in order to kill and mutilate them. "Since large-scale diamond smuggling was possible so long as the country remained in chaos, profits from these 'blood diamonds' represented an important incentive for armed groups to prolong the war" (Bellows 146). In fact, the main point of the war waged by the RUF may not have been to win it and politically rule over the people, but to engage in profitable crime under the cover of warfare. At the very least, this rebel group was savvy enough to understand that the greatest personal economic gain could occur when the country was maintained in a state of chaos. Additionally, their main concern was removing villages from the diamonds sites that they wished to control. As a result, great atrocities were brought upon the civilians of Sierra Leone.

The rebel groups in Sierra Leone practiced guerilla warfare: small, mobile military groups performed irregular ambushes and raids upon civilian villages. The RUF highly consisted of ruthless, drugged-up adolescents, and the acts they performed upon civilians were severe: this is evident by the names of their raids, such as “Operation Clean Sweep,” “Operation No Living Thing,” and “Operation Everything That Moves,” and the battle-names of individuals such as “Baby Killer” and “General Chaos.” Out of the civilians who survived these raids were those captured as slaves, abducted to be soldiers, or mutilated in order to be left helpless. In response to Ahmed Tejan Kabbah’s (the Sierra Leone president during 1996) stated request to ‘join hands for the future of Sierra Leone,’ the RUF amputated as many peoples’ hands as possible and placed bag after bag of these severed body parts on the steps of the president’s palace. Sierra Leoneans with mutilated hands, legs, lips, eyes, or ears have given many accounts of acts of torture performed by the rebels such as soldiers tearing out fetuses of pregnant women with bayonets, or burning children on stakes in front of their mothers.

Although some persons volunteered to join the ranks of RUF, not many individuals were willing to do so. In order to sufficiently expand their numbers, the rebel group had to revert to a more creative tactic. During their village raids, they would abduct pre-teenage boys and girls in order to brainwash them into becoming soldiers. Girls and boys typically fulfilled different roles within the army: boys were trained to slaughter people during village raids, while girls were treated as sex slaves. It is “estimated that half of all combatants in the RUF have been between the ages of 8 and 14 years. A large number of them have been killed, injured and

mutilated in the course of the civil war” (Zack-Williams 74). Youthful combatants were, in a certain sense, the ideal soldiers. They were brave, easily manipulated, obeyed orders, had few external ties (especially if their families had been killed), and they felt a sense of prestige with the newfound feel of power that was associated with being a soldier of the RUF. Drugs and arms enhanced their ability to fight: the AK-47, the typical weapon of choice for the RUF, is a rifle that is light enough to be used and manipulated by children, and most child soldiers were given narcotics before they went into a raid.

Purchasing weapons is no cheap enterprise. In order to raise the funds that were needed to foster this bloody civil war, members of the RUF sold diamonds from the mines that they had captured. The process is relatively simple. The RUF would patrol diamond sites with weapons in order to monitor the slaves they had captured as they dig for diamonds. When a diamond was found, it was taken from the slave and collected by a captain of an RUF unit. Once enough diamonds were gathered, soldiers would travel to Liberia with a different set of slaves, which they called ‘mules.’ Upon reaching Liberia’s border, the diamonds were exchanged for weapons with Liberian officials, and these weapons were loaded upon the backs of the ‘mules.’ Liberia’s president Charles Taylor encouraged this process: he was gaining a great amount of diamonds in exchange for the weapons he supplied to the RUF. During the long journey home, any ‘mule’ who began to fall behind was instantly killed. As one could imagine, these ‘mule’ slaves had a particularly short lifespan.

Once a diamond crossed Liberia's borders, it was sold to diamond merchants who then shipped the rough stones to De Beers' offices in Belgium on order cut and polished. Once a stone is cut, it is literally impossible to trace it back to its place of origin. Although De Beers could claim not to be making illicit sales directly from rebel groups within Sierra Leone, the undercover actions that were taking place were obvious. Such trades were reflected in discrepancies of reports: according to a report issued, "While the estimates of Liberian diamond output are between 100,000 and 150,000 carats, the Diamond High Council, based in Antwerp, records Liberian imports into Belgium of over 31 million carats between 1994 and 1998 – an average of over six million carats a year" (Campbell 69). Although it was easily foreseeable that harm was occurring upon individuals due to a lack of regulation within the diamond trade, international enterprises were unwilling to open their eyes to this fact. Ultimately, the blood shed by Sierra Leoneans partially lies in the hands of companies such as De Beers and all of the affluent nations involved in this trading process.

*Sierra Leonean Government Response to the Rebels United Front*

In order to combat rebel groups such as the RUF, the Sierra Leone government utilized the Sierra Leone Army (SLA). However, this group was poorly trained and not paid by the government. As a result, it also became ridden with corruption. After a period of time, a sort of cooperation was established between the rebels and the SLA. They coordinated movements to avoid direct battles and worked out mutually beneficial profit arrangements over diamonds. In the end, civilians were often victimized by both the rebel groups and the SLA. A number of

reactions occurred in response to this new level of corruption. First, different villages formed small civilian armies deemed the 'Civil Defense Forces' (CDF). These civilians decided to attempt to protect their towns on their own, but they found little success in this enterprise. Second, Sierra Leonean president Strasser hired an outside army to combat the rebel groups. This army was effective in fighting the RUF, but the U.N. questioned the morality of such outside assistance purchased through a shady company, and it forced Captain Strasser to abolish this practice.

Eventually, a peacekeeping army from the United Nations (ECOMOG) entered Sierra Leone in an attempt to cease the fighting. ECOMOG mainly consisted of Nigerian soldiers who had questionable practices as well. As a result, ECOMOG's attempt to wrest control away from the RUF was poorly executed. In 1997, the RUF marched through Freetown and staged a coup so bloody that the current president, Kabbah was sent into exile. In 1998, president Kabbah was reinstated, but in 1999 the RUF entered into Freetown again with an even bolder assault. It is recorded that during these raids, it was difficult to distinguish the RUF from ECOMOG. Both armies killed anything that moved, and the civilians were not able to trust either side. Progress against the rebels finally occurred when British forces entered the nation in 2000. The war was officially declared to be over in 2002: after over a decade of fighting, 75,000 deaths and the displacement of over half of a country, a peace treaty was finally established.

#### *Lack of Fulfillment of Human Rights In Sierra Leone*

Pogge's definition of human rights consists of claims on coercive social institutions and those who uphold such institutions. He claims, "A human right to X

entails the demand that, insofar as reasonably possible, any coercive social institution be designed that all human beings affected by them have secure access to X” (Pogge 52). So, a human right to life and physical integrity is fulfilled for specific persons if and only if their security against certain threats does not fall below certain thresholds. Basic goods that are necessary to achieve personal value of human life include: physical integrity, freedom of movement and action, subsistence supplies, basic education, and economic participation. One’s human rights are fulfilled when she has secure access to a *minimally adequate* share of all of these goods.

The lack of fulfillment of human rights within Sierra Leone has been extreme and a great amount of harm has occurred. In fact, each of the basic rights as outlined by Pogge has been extensively violated in this scenario. Therefore, Sierra Leone requires our utmost attention and efforts.

### **Consequences of Conflict Diamonds: Sierra Leone’s Current State of Poverty**

Although the civil war is no longer actively occurring, the aftermath is apparent throughout Sierra Leone. Many individuals remain displaced from their home country (McGriffin 17). Within the northern parts of the country, the RUF continues to hold the rights to various diamond fields, as this was part of the peace treaty established with this rebel group. Although random raids upon villages are no longer performed, the RUF continues to use slave labor to mine their diamonds.

Within the rest of the country, severe poverty continues to exist for a variety of reasons. First, the average earnings of a diamond miner is approximately 60

cents per day. Although this is not involuntary labor, it is seemingly close to forms of slavery. Men typically work for subsistence diamond miners, who exploit impoverished individuals by offering the use of the supplies needed to dig for diamonds in exchange for lifetime indebtedness to their enterprise. Working conditions are harsh, risks are high, and production techniques are rudimentary (Goreux 4).

Another lasting effect of the conflict is the environmental damage upon the majority of districts within Sierra Leone, especially in Kono. The devastation of land by the rebel groups' careless extraction practices has led to an inability to produce food via agriculture. In Sierra Leone, rice accounts for nearly half of the daily caloric intake. Yet, the country's farmers have not been able to recover their land in order to feed its people. "By 2003, after 6 years in which population growth was nearly 70% higher than growth in food production, the country was importing over 145,000 tonnes [of rice]" (McGriffin 17). A food crisis began to plague Sierra Leone: food prices doubled in the first four months of 2008, and many individuals faced starvation.

### **Have Attempts At Rectification Been Sufficient?**

Recently, various actions have been performed in order to attempt to decrease the prevalence of conflict diamonds within the diamond trade. As previously noted, peace has been established in this country through armies supplied by the U.N. In addition, recent attempts have been aiming at proving certification about the origins of diamonds through an elaboration between various



countries and enterprises called 'The Kimberley Process.' However, such processes are not closely monitored, and it is easy to avoid proper certification. Currently, Sierra Leone continues to face high levels of poverty. Due to harms imposed upon the people that were sustained by global institutions, I propose that international agencies continue to have duties toward the impoverished members of Sierra Leone. This negative duty requires positive actions in order to rectify the harms performed upon the impoverished within Sierra Leone: it is not sufficient to merely sever relationships with rebel forces and corrupt internal factor. The obligations in place are not limited to social institutions such as De Beers. Rather, human rights place claims upon both "coercive social institutions" and "those who uphold such institutions" (Pogge 51). The fulfillment of these duties towards Sierra Leone falls upon: regulation groups within the UN, global diamond enterprises such as De Beers, nations who have benefited from the harm caused such as the US, UK, and Belgium, and individual consumers of diamonds.

### **Plausible Steps Towards Fulfilling These Duties Entailed by Human Rights**

In order to address the needs that impoverished individuals face in Sierra Leone, we cannot simply rely on traditional humanitarian efforts. There is often a mismatch between contemporary crisis and traditional humanitarian responses: when organizations fails to appropriately assess the needs of a location, then the relief provided will not prove to be sufficient.

One major component that ought to be addressed is the need for land restoration within Sierra Leone. The best plausible way in which to do so is through

organizations that hire Sierra Leoneans (thus providing jobs) and training them to use technologies available to restore the land to plots usable for agriculture. This would begin to address the needs of individuals within this country who face starvation. Once food crops begin to recover, Sierra Leone will not be forced to rely upon imported goods.

Second, increased regulations of the diamond trade are necessary in order to ensure that diamonds are not traded at the cost of individual lives. However, such regulations are futile if civilians are forced to work for companies that exploit them. The basic needs of individuals have to be met in order for them to be empowered and released from dependency on wealthier groups. Such basic needs could be met through Pogge's proposal of a Global Resource Dividend (GRD). This proposal requires that a small part of the value of resources be shared with the poor individuals who helped to attain those resources. This responsibility lies within the hands of companies such as De Beers (and the governments of the countries that regulate De Beers) and the Sierra Leone government. Additionally, De Beers' control of the industry has to be loosened so that others have the opportunity to gain from this enterprise without being forced to turn towards illicit means in order to do so.

Third, in order to further decrease the potential for exploitation of those who work in the mining industry, a small-scale micro-finance institution could give loans to groups of diamond diggers, so that these groups of people could buy the equipment needed to perform the mining process. Currently, miners often have to rely upon more affluent individuals for the provisions of rudimentary equipment.

Once this equipment has been provided, the laborers are tied to these individuals and this dependency leads to exploitation. Empowering individuals through loans for the purchase of equipment would allow persons to be free from this sort of dependency.

Lastly, a sort of duty lies within each individual consumer once he or she gains knowledge of the prevalence of diamond acquired through harmful methods. When purchasing a diamond, one can ensure that it is conflict-free. Doing so requires research into the countries of origin from which a company obtains its diamonds. This sort of knowledge can be accessible. For example, certain agencies such as 'Brilliant Earth' are committed to selling diamonds that were obtained through ethical practices. Although the consumer may have to increase the amount he or she is paying in order to buy a diamond, such a sacrifice is worth the assurance of fulfilling certain basic human rights.

## **Conclusion**

The lack of the fulfillment of human rights in Sierra Leone has been sustained and encouraged by a global order. As a result, Pogge's arguments are applicable in the case of Sierra Leone: international institutions hold moral obligations to alleviate poverty in this country, due to past harms imposed upon impoverished Sierra Leoneans. Note that this claim is not equivalent to the claim that Pogge holds in every situation: it does not answer the question as to whether the entire global poor are harmed by the international order. However, it does imply that there is a system in place that allows for nations across the globe to strongly affect each other,

and therefore it seems unlikely that poverty can often be solely caused by local factors. We ought to take our impact on other nations seriously: it is no longer the case that we only affect those within our communities.

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