

## **DIAMONDS of CONFLICT, BLOOD and WAR**

Africa's central position on the agenda of the forthcoming G8 conference in June should focus more attention on the bloody role of diamonds in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, Liberal MP David Pratt told the February lunch of the Group of 78. Mr. Pratt, chair of the Commons defence committee, said it must be understood that "there is an incredibly close connection between organized crime involved in the illegal diamond trade and arms shipments, child soldiers, AIDs and other abuses." "I am disappointed at the level of international law enforcement on this issue" of the illegal diamond trade, Mr. Pratt said. But the G8 conference of developed democracies, set for Kananaskis, Alta., in June would discuss development of a new partnership with Africa.

Mr. Pratt became involved a dozen years ago including a first visit to Sierra Leone where rebel forces eventually took control of the rich diamond fields to finance their bloody assault on the nation of 4.5 million people. The organization Partnership Africa Canada in a report called Heart of the Matter had "kick started" heightened concern about the illegal diamond trade, he said. Shortly after that event two years ago, the United Nations became more involved, leading to a process of international conferences called the Kimberly Process. The aim is an international regime of identification for illegal diamonds but an enforcement mechanism is a problem, the MP said. Canada is concerned because of its own rich and growing diamond production, worth \$400 to \$500 million annually. Should there be one federal act to deal with the identity problem or is there a need for amendments to assorted pieces of legislation affecting the various federal departments involved from trade to foreign affairs, labor and Indian and Northern Affairs?

Mr. Pratt said his last report on the situation two years ago focused on an aircraft that left the Ukraine for Africa laden with illegal arms. He had told the RCMP who tipped the Italian forces chasing an illegal arms dealer. Neighboring Libya was helping the Sierra Leone rebels "but a lot more pressure has to be brought on area arms traders," he said. He noted that after the breakup of the Soviet Union, many small Eastern European nations continued to flood the illegal arms market. He said Canada needs to try to ensure that the illegal arms flow from Europe is ended. As for the giant diamond merchant DeBeers, he told a questioner, it was aware that any diamond boycott would hit its profits and therefore it was opposing the illegal diamond trafficking. South Africa and Russia would also be affected by a boycott on diamonds, he said, and the importance of the gems was illustrated by the fact that the small African nation of Botswana got more than 50 per cent of its revenue from the gems. The Sierra Leone diamond fields remained in rebel hands despite efforts by a considerable UN military force. And the government elected in 1996 had not yet been able to deal with atrocities against the population including rampant use

of child soldiers. An Indian general with the UN forces had told him that the youngest soldier he had seen was a five-year-old lugging a machine gun.