

**FROM THE DIRECTOR - EDWARD ZWICK:  
Written for Amnesty International Study Guide**

When I first read about Sierra Leone, I was shocked. I'd read books about the colonial "Scramble for Africa," about the exploitation of its ivory, rubber and gold, but to learn the history

of diamonds was to learn the story of Africa all over again.

In certain ways the movie we've made is very conventional, an action drama about three people whose lives are forever changed by the discovery of a single rough stone. But because the story takes place in such a charged political context it is also an opportunity to evoke the kind of provocative images and complex issues seldom treated in Hollywood films. It's always been my belief that entertainment and ideas need not be mutually exclusive and that political awareness can be raised as much by narrative as by rhetoric.

If a single piece of work was capable of bringing about immediate change, then so many well intentioned films over the years would have long ago solved the world's problems. But raising consciousness is a distance event, not a sprint. It's important to remember that 150 years ago in this country it was entirely acceptable for a man to own another man. Twenty years ago people thought nothing of drinking and driving. Five years ago you could smoke in restaurants and on airplanes. These are remarkable paradigm shifts, but they only came about by a number of people willing to hold up a mirror, unflattering at times, in order to show the world to itself. As a filmmaker, all I can do is to add my voice to the chorus. Eventually the aggregate effect of movies, songs, documentaries, and editorials are compounded until it reaches a kind of tipping point. And change happens.

The United States purchases about nine billion dollars' worth of diamonds every year. More than two-thirds of the world's sales. If its consumers insist that each stone be accompanied by a verifiable warranty, it's going to have a very powerful effect. This is one of those rare situations in which an individual can become pro-active by virtue of nothing more than educating himself. We simply have to take responsibility for our consumerism.

I have nothing against diamonds (or rubies or emeralds or sapphires). Gems are beautiful and desirable. To buy or not to buy is an individual decision. But it has to be an informed decision. I do object when their acquisition is complicit in the debasement of children, or the destruction of a country. I find it unconscionable that the resources of the third world be exploited for the sake of our vanity, and above all that billions of dollars of corporate profit are built on the backs of workers paid a dollar a day. The story of Sierra Leone is not unique.

My hope is that in telling a story like this, it might help prevent it from happening again.

- Edward Zwick 2006