

GEMS AND AFRICAN NATIONS

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 20, 2000

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, today I pass along information about how the diamonds at the heart of several African wars could be transformed from a curse into a blessing for its people.

Representative TONY HALL of Ohio has worked for months on the problems of conflict diamonds, in large part because of what he saw in Sierra Leone last December. Hundreds of thousands of people have been driven from their homes by fighting, tens of thousands have died, and countless numbers have watched as rebels hacked off their loved ones' arms, legs, ears, or noses.

Mr. HALL of Ohio has spoken many times about this, and I urge our colleagues to look at the diamonds that are symbols of love and commitment to Americans a little differently—and look into the role they play in the war machines in several African countries. Not all diamonds are bloody, but the industry collects 30 percent of its profits from the ones that are.

Today, there is reason to hope that the legitimate diamond industry is going to help choke off this terrible trade. I hope they will do more and endorse the proposals Congressman HALL made this week. Those suggestions are described in a thoughtful and interesting article from the Dayton Daily News. Its author, Kay Semion, points out ways that "gems could transform African lives." I urge our colleagues to take a moment to read it and I am submitting it for the RECORD.

[Dayton Daily News, July 19, 2000]

GEMS COULD TRANSFORM AFRICAN LIVES

(By Kay Semion)

Diamonds are not always a girl's best friend, U.S. Rep. Tony Hall says—not when they finance warlords who terrorize the people of Sierra Leone, Angola and other diamond-producing nations. The Dayton Democrat returned Monday to Washington from Antwerp, Belgium, where he had pleaded with the leaders of the World Diamond Congress to cut off these warlords and to help the countries they are devastating.

On one plan, he will likely be successful. The diamond industry is responding to pressures from him and others to trace diamonds so profits do not go into the bloody hands of rebel hoodlums. These outlaws are so greedy that they drug children and train them to be brutal warriors, who can cut off arms and legs without a moment of rue.

On another plea, however, diamond executives were silent. Hall urged them to help repair those nations that diamond warlords have torn apart.

He gave them two options: Contribute 1 percent of their profits to nation-building programs such as UNICEF or Doctors Without Borders. And begin a foundation—the Sparkle Fund—to support a micro-enterprise system for certain African nations.

"You could have heard a pin drop," Hall said of the reaction to his quests for investing in Africa. "There were 500 to 600 in the hall, and it was real quiet."

No wonder. It's easier to say you're sorry and won't do it again than it is to help those who have been harmed—even inadvertently.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

But Hall is right. And his proposed Sparkle Fund is most promising, based on the successful micro-enterprise system developed by Muhammad Yunus.

Yunus is a Bangladeshi economist who was educated in the United States and returned to his country to teach about 25 years ago. In walks he took during leisure hours, he noticed that the women in villages were in a poverty cycle—making products but not profits because they were always in debt to the village loan sharks.

His efforts to get banks or governments to help failed, so in 1976 he set up a system that became known as the Grameen Bank. The "bank" began with small loans from his pocket—\$20 or \$30—so the women could buy supplies for making chairs or pottery. Borrowers became bank officers who then approved other loans. The process not only ensured that loans would be repaid but also provided help for those starting small enterprise businesses. Today that bank has 35,000 branches, hundreds of millions in loans and a 96 percent repayment rate.

Hall is asking the World Diamond Congress to borrow this successful economic model.

This "is not a contribution to corrupt officials' pockets," Hall told the diamond executives. "It is an investment directly in the poor who make up the overwhelming number of these countries' citizens."

An investment in the micro-enterprise system, he continued, would demonstrate "the stake you have in peace in Africa."

Here's Hall's idea: Market something like a "Hope" diamond—one of the gems that could easily have come from a diamond-rich country such as Sierra Leone. Use the profits from that sale to start the fund, then contribute, say, \$50 million a year to that seed money for a decade.

Use the marketing skills gained in selling women on "eternity rings," Hall suggested.

Consider what has happened with the Grameen Bank and other micro-enterprise systems. The person who borrows money (usually a woman) not only gets the loan, but she gets supporting partners from the bank's committee. They teach her business rules she may have no other way of learning, and they offer technical assistance. In Bangladesh, the bank even has officers who wander about the country using cell phones to provide help.

Almost always, these systems build up a network of devoted people—the very ones who are approached and supportive when relief agencies seek help to stop the spread of diseases such as AIDS.

Hall simply wants the diamond industry to transform blood diamonds into sparkling gems. That's not too much to ask.

TRIBUTE TO CURTIS J. KNOWLES,
RECIPIENT OF THE BOB LING
MEMORIAL SERVICE AWARD

HON. NICK SMITH

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 20, 2000

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, on July 22, 2000 the Village of Athens will celebrate its heritage and the new millennium during Homecoming 2000 activities. As part of the celebration, the community will honor Curtis J. Knowles with the Bob Ling Memorial Service Award.

Born and raised in Hillsdale County, Michigan, Curt and I attended Addison High School

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and Pilgrim Fellowship at Somerset Congregational Church together. Curt attended Michigan State University and Hillsdale College, graduating in 1961. While in school, he and his father started the Knowles Excavating Company and did much work throughout southern Michigan. Curt moved with his family to Athens in 1966 where he began teaching and coaching. He served as the head boys' basketball coach until being named athletic director in 1975. In addition to boys' athletics, Curt coached Athens area girls softball from 1979 to 1994. He was elected president of the Athletic Boosters Club in 1978 and held that post until he retired from teaching in 1996.

Curt joined the Athens Improvement Association in 1974 and has worked tirelessly for the betterment of the community through numerous projects, including serving as the annual homecoming parade announcer for the past 23 years. Curt is well known for his upbeat attitude and wonderful sense of humor.

Regardless of the occasion, he always has a funny or interesting story to share. In his retirement, Curt has returned to his roots, rejoining the family excavating business in partnership with his son John.

The strength of communities like Athens lies in the many dedicated citizens who give selflessly of their time and talents to enhance the quality of life for those around them. Curt Knowles has always been one of these exemplary citizens.

I am proud to call Curt a lifelong friend and join with the citizens of Athens in thanking him for his many years of service to the community and congratulating his on this well deserved honor.

CENTRAL NEW JERSEY CELEBRATES THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF SOMERVILLE CARPENTERS' LOCAL UNION #455

HON. RUSH D. HOLT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 20, 2000

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the Somerville Carpenters' Local Union #455's 100th Anniversary. Over the last century, Carpenters' Local #455 has made significant contributions to our community by supplying skilled Craftsmen that have helped fuel the tremendous growth of Somerset and Hunterdon Counties.

Carpenters Local Union #455 was founded in Somerville on January 24, 1900 by Peter J. McGuire. Serving at the time as the Secretary Treasurer of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, he understood what was necessary to train first-rate, professional carpenters and ensure that they produced a top-notch, reliable product. With this knowledge, the Carpenters' Local #455 was established to provide training to its workers that would allow them to produce the excellent craftsmanship vital to the development of our communities.

In the 100 years since its founding, the Carpenters' Local #455's trade and communities have experienced significant changes. Throughout these transitions, it has grown even stronger. It has remained firm in its commitment to providing the very best Craftsmen