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‘United we are much stronger than the sum of our parts,’ WDC President tells Kimberley Process Plenary in Guangzhou

NOVEMBER 11, 2014 — “We should always remember that millions of people are depending on the well-being of the diamond industry for their livelihoods. From the miners and their families in the producing countries, through to the polishing and trading centers, the jewelry manufacturers and the retailers, we all need to face the future and contribute together to make the diamond world a better, safer and more transparent industry. We can only do so if we work together,” said Edward Asscher, President of the World Diamond Council.

He was speaking to the 2014 Plenary Meeting of the Kimberley Process, which opened today in the Chinese city of Guangzhou.

The following is the full text of his address to the meeting:

Honorable Chair of the Kimberley Process Your Excellency Mr. Chuanzhong Wei; Your Excellencies; ministers of so many important countries; Mr. Bernardo Campos, Vice Chair; dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my honor to address my first Plenary Session of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme as the newly elected president of the World Diamond Council, which has represented the diamond industry at the Kimberley Process for more than a decade. I would like to assure that the WDC will continue in that role and carry on supporting the KP’s essential work and its objectives.

The KP has been very successful and saved many lives, and we have many to thank for these successes over the years. Firstly, I would like to thank the various governments all over the world who made the KP possible, now 81 countries strong. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the considerable efforts and leadership shown by my predecessors, Avi Paz and of course Eli Izhakoff in the invaluable and lasting contributions they have made.

I would also like to make special mention of our dear colleague, Mark Van Bockstael – an original “Kimberlite” – who is regrettably not well and unable to attend this Plenary, and we wish him all the best. And I want to salute Andy Bone who is here and this will be his last KP as he is leaving us. He is one of the first original “Kimberlites” as well.

Our thoughts also go out to all those countries with Ebola and the people suffering from it. It is bringing great distress to Africa and I am glad to see that so many countries contribute in fighting the disease. For the human suffering, money alone is never enough. All of us must address the tragedies and the economic impact this virus has on so many people and amongst diamond mining communities in West Africa.

The Mission of the WDC is of course to support and improve the working and impact of the Kimberley Process Certification System.

WDC will promote and stress the correct implementation of the standards around the world. All members should use the same methodology, the same methods with the same discipline, and those involved should have access to the same knowledge base. But this will require increased co-operation and support for those who experience difficulties to achieve these objectives.

Another aspect of the mission of the WDC is to encourage the KP to address the various challenges facing the KP arising from business practices that could potentially impact KPCS compliance. One of them is the implied risk to the integrity of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme as mentioned in the Financial Action Task Force report of 2013. In the Working Groups this week, we will contribute to the discussions around the various aspects of the report, the actions called for and the issues raised. It is here where transparency and compliance is so important for the future of our industry.

For me, it is a pleasure to work closely together with the Civil Society coalition. Civil Society and the WDC have the same goals, although we acknowledge that we do not always agree on the best way to achieve those goals, or what issues are relevant for discussion in the effective implementation of the KP. But I am looking forward to working closely with Alan Martin and his team.

I think we all agree that improving the way we manage and maintain knowledge and institutional memory is crucial to the future effectiveness of the Kimberley Process. His Excellency, Mr Wei and myself, representing the World Diamond Council, signed the agreement for the Administrative Support Mechanism (ASM) last July in Antwerp; it operates with the generous support of the Antwerp World Diamond Center, the Israel Diamond Institute, the Gem and Jewellery Export and Promotion Council of India and the Diamond Development Initiative on behalf of the WDC.

This week we will propose an additional role for the ASM. We shall start working on the training aspect of new participants and officials. Over the years many participants and those working within the KP move on and others take their place on a frequent basis. We must be able to offer them training for a better understanding of the KP standards and working methods. The ASM is now also serving, besides a general support function, as a collective memory and knowledge base for all involved.

WDC strongly supports the Mano River Union initiative, and we shall support that initiative through the Administrative Support Mechanism.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the competition we face in the markets will only increase further. Consumers will continue to be more discerning in their choices and more sophisticated in the way they research and make those choices. It has been said before, but we must bear it in mind at all times, the consumer is our only source of value and it is up to us to demonstrate to them that purchasing diamonds is the best choice they can make.

We should always remember that millions of people are depending on the well-being of the diamond industry for their livelihoods. From the miners and their families in the producing countries through to the polishing and trading centers, the jewelry manufacturers and the retailers, we all need to face the future and contribute together to make the diamond world a better, safer and more transparent industry. We can only do so if we work together. United we are much stronger than the sum of our parts.

I call on all of us here present today and those working in and associated with our business around the world, to work in unison to protect the integrity of our product. In the end our mission is to strengthen the confidence of the consumer and to leave a better diamond world for the future generations who work in our fantastic industry.

About the World Diamond Council

The primary objective of the WDC is to represent the diamond industry in the development and implementation of the regulatory and voluntary systems to control the trade in diamonds embargoed by the United Nations or covered by the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. Visit <http://www.worlddiamondcouncil.org> to learn more.