



Feriel Zerouki
WDC President

Opening Address to KP Intersessional

Elephant Hills, Victoria Falls
Zimbabwe

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Your Excellency, the Minister of Mines and Mining Development, and Chair of the Kimberley Process, Winston Chitando,
Kimberley Process Vice Chair, Ahmed Bin Sulayem,
Dr. Michel Yoboué, Coordinator of the Civil Society Coalition,
Chairs of the Kimberley Process Working Bodies,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am both honored and privileged to be speaking to you today, for what is my inaugural address to the Kimberley Process as President of the World Diamond Council.

First, I would like to take a moment to share our deepest condolences for the loss of our esteemed colleague and brother, Tongai Muzenda. Our hearts go out to his family, the KP Chair and his team, and all those that have been impacted by this loss. May you all be surrounded by strength and compassion during this difficult time.

Before stepping up to the podium, the significance of this moment from a personal perspective struck me, and I thought it fitting that I may share some of my thoughts with all of you. This is because I believe that in many ways my own journey in the diamond industry is reflective of how far we all have traveled together, how we are evolving, and where I strongly hope that the KP will be able to go.

Before I do though, allow to me express the appreciation of the WDC to our hosts – the KP Chair, Honorable Minister Chitando and the Government of Zimbabwe – for gathering us in this spectacular setting, on which I believe we can reach easy consensus to say that it is truly one of the wonders of our world. How fitting a place it is to consider the potential offered to society by nature, and to discuss what we need to do in order to ensure that this potential is realized in a responsible, comprehensive and equitable way.

I would also like to pay tribute to my predecessor, former WDC President Edward Asscher, who stepped away from the post just several days ago, after many years of dedicated service. Edward is an individual devoted to the public interest, serving in a variety of industry positions, amongst them five years as WDC President, and back home also as a senator in the upper house of the Dutch parliament. As the son of one the diamond industry's most celebrated families,

he was dedicated not only to the business, but also – and especially – to the people and nations associated with it. He rarely made a public address as WDC President without stressing the principle, and I quote “that we must not leave anyone behind.” It is a standard that I endorse wholeheartedly, and plan to uphold throughout my term in office.

I will do everything within my power to build on the legacy that Edward leaves behind, and to explain how I wish to do that I would like to begin by sharing some information about who I am and my journey here.

First things first, I am a proud African. I am also the first woman ever to head an international diamond industry association.

My family hails from an ancient town called M’daourouch, which is located in a beautiful area of the Aures Mountains in the northeast of Algeria. I grew up in what was still very much a post-colonial environment, where the sense of hard-fought independence and the pride of self-achievement were real and fresh.

I joined the diamond industry in 2005, when, as a recent university graduate, I was hired as an analyst by De Beers. It was five years after the establishment of the KP and two years after the launch of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. The company and the wider diamond sector were undergoing a massive transformation – not only in the way we operated, but also in the way we perceived our mission and our responsibility to our shareholders, communities, consumers and to our millions of stakeholders.

I am sure you can appreciate that at the time, as a young female North African, I did not fit the stereotype of a diamond mining company executive. But times were changing, and it is a credit to the evolving leadership within the sector, people like those gathered in this room, that the girl from M’daourouch is standing before you today.

It takes courage, and it’s not easy to go against the grain, but people like you and I can be the architects and the implementers of change.

I set out to do what I could, to be an agent of positive change within the industry. I began my activity in the WDC and in the KP in 2014. As De Beers’ Head of International Relations at the time, I was of course well acquainted with the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. But it was when I began attending KP meetings and participating in bilateral consultations that I became more fully aware of the complex structure of this forum, and of the forces and dynamics that govern its decision-making structure and its ability to get things done.

One of the features I have observed during my time with the Kimberley Process – indeed, something that quite likely occurs with any international body – is a tendency to organize into camps, where the underlying trend is that history, politics, economics and geography dictate the group to which you should belong. While this is entirely understandable, unfortunately it also runs the risk of engendering an attitude of “us” and “them,” potentially entrenching the belief that the other side does not fully understand where you are coming from. It can also lead to an assumption that interests are inherently divergent and that common ground is difficult to find. This can of course have a devastating impact on progress, as it becomes the victim of this separation.

However, let me say clearly that these are assumptions that I fundamentally reject.

Don't get me wrong – I am not naïve. I appreciate that there are national and business interests at stake, and that we all are committed to faithfully representing the countries and organizations that we represent. But my own lived experience has taught me of the inability to predict people's opinions or positions based on where they come from, and that a diverse group ultimately enables more successful and stable outcomes, as long as we constantly seek to recognize each other's positive intentions. After all, we all stand behind one objective, and that is the success of the KP.

Moreover, I believe it is possible for all of us to coalesce around two cardinal principles. The first is that natural diamond resources need to provide fair and equitable benefit to the people and countries from which they originate, and this includes enabling those people to utilize those resources for their own wellbeing and long-term development. The second is that the success of the natural diamond economy is dependent upon the product maintaining its status as an aspirational purchase from a consumer perspective. These principles are not independent of one another. If the one is not met, it's unlikely the other will be.

There is a common misconception that in business the profit motive clouds all other judgement. It certainly is not valid today. Consumers in 2023 insist that the purchases they make meet their own values system, and we need to lean in to this prevailing attitude if we are to meet their expectations in the long run. Put simply, the values of a diamond will determine the value of that diamond.

One of the most rewarding and proudest periods of my career in the diamond industry has been as General Manager of GemFair, which as many of you will know is an initiative that was launched by De Beers in Sierra Leone to enable KP-compliant artisanal miners access to the formalized international pipeline, and to

obtain fair value for their goods. These are people, some of whom witnessed and experienced the worst of the conflict diamond crisis in the late 1990s and early 2000s, who today are fully harnessing the opportunity of building better lives for themselves and their families. Just as we work to support our families, their needs are no different, and despite all the differences between us – be it geography, language, culture, or anything else – we are all ultimately committed to the same goals so success for one should be seen as success for all.

Likewise, a positive conclusion to the current Review and Reform Cycle, to which the WDC is fully committed, will be to our mutual benefit. I am heartened by the constructive atmosphere that we have witnessed in the discussions thus far, and by the wise leadership shown by the committee chair, Angola, Brother Lau, and the vice chair South Africa, Cecil Khosa.

We are also encouraged by the multi-faceted leadership of the committee's sub teams, and by the fact that all of the chairs are representative of active participants in our value chain, including Botswana, South Africa, India and the World Diamond Council. This is the type of heterogenous family I had in mind when talking of how diverse groups can deliver more successful and stable outcomes.

The leader of the critically important sub-team working on the conflict diamond definition is the WDC's own Kele Mafole, a young and talented South African woman, who before becoming an industry representative participated in meetings of the Kimberley Process as a government delegate. Her experience as a Participant and now an Observer underlines that there is more that connects us than what holds us apart.

Ultimately, the success of the Review and Reform Cycle will be judged by the degree to which we are able to progress in providing a more germane definition of conflict diamonds, reflective of the challenges that exist in 2023. We have the ability to get there together.

The WDC and I are excited by the opportunity to meet those challenges and others, together with all of you. Our differences should not divide us – our diversity can be the source of our greatest strength.

I wish us all a productive and constructive Intersessional meeting.

Thank you.