

Hip-Hop Bling and 'Dirty' Gold

Written by Robert ID2338

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Hip-hop culture loves their 'bling'. One of the largest days for jewelry giving is coming up – Valentine's Day. As this day approaches and everyone is heading out to buy their boo a 'lil somethin somethin' here is something to ponder and to realize that gold has a direct connection to basic human rights and environmental destruction and the large jewelry industry "leaders" say they want the gold mining corporations to clean up their act and produce gold more responsibly; with less of a human toll. So as much as hip-hop loves their bling, this is something to consider before you rush out and cop that Valentine 'gold' for your boo.

For the first time ever, eight of the world's top jewelry retailers have pledged to move away from "dirty" gold sales and are calling on mining corporations to ensure that gold is produced in more socially and environmentally responsible ways. The retailers, which are the Zale Corp., the Signet Group (the parent firm of Sterling and Kay Jewelers), Tiffany & Co., Helzberg Diamonds, Fortunoff, Cartier, Piaget, and Van Cleef & Arpels, are being praised by the No Dirty Gold campaign today in a full-page ad in The New York Times, timed to coincide with Valentine's Day, one of the biggest jewelry-buying holidays in the United States.

"Because jewelry retailers buy the majority of gold produced worldwide, they have the power to help clean up the mining industry," said Payal Sampat, co-director of the No Dirty Gold campaign and international campaign director for EARTHWORKS. "We applaud the leadership of these companies. It's an important first step."

More than 80 percent of the gold produced worldwide is used to make jewelry. Retail sales of jewelry in the U.S. alone surpassed \$45 billion in 2004, of which gold jewelry accounted for \$17 billion. The eight companies identified as "leaders" together represent \$6.3 billion in retail jewelry sales, or 14 percent of sales in the United States, which is second only to India in annual gold consumption. Four of the top 10 U.S. jewelry firms -- Zales, Kay Jewelers (Sterling/Signet), Tiffany & Co., and Helzberg Diamonds -- are among the firms identified as "leaders."

The New York Times ad (available at <http://www.nodirtygold.org>) features a heart-shaped locket with images depicting the environmental and human toll of gold mining, and the headline "There's nothing romantic about a toxic gold mine." The ad then names both the retail jewelry "leaders," that have made in-principle commitments to sourcing more responsibly produced gold and those "laggard" companies that have not yet done so. The "laggard" retailers identified by the campaign are Rolex, JCPenney, Wal-Mart, Fred Meyer Jewelers, Whitehall Jewellers, Jostens, QVC, and Sears/Kmart.

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"Despite growing demand from concerned consumers, mining corporations have yet to significantly reduce the harm their operations are inflicting on communities in many parts of the world," said Keith Slack, co-director of the No Dirty Gold campaign and senior policy advisor for Oxfam America. "When major jewelry retailers' demand ethically produced gold for their products, it's time for the mining industry to take note and make changes in their practices."

Growing controversy over new mine proposals and news stories detailing environmental and human rights abuses and corruption within the gold mining industry have prompted retailers to worry about their brand reputations and have spurred consumers to question the source of their gold purchases. Since the No Dirty Gold campaign was launched two years ago, more than 30,000 consumers have signed a petition urging mining corporations to clean up their act and produce gold more responsibly.

The jewelry industry "leaders" named by the No Dirty Gold campaign have endorsed human rights, environmental, and social justice principles that call for responsible practices in producing gold and precious metals. These include:

- (1) Respect for basic human rights outlined in international conventions and law;
- (2) Free, prior, and informed consent from affected communities;
- (3) Respect for workers' rights and labor standards;
- (4) Protecting parks and natural reserves from mining; and,
- (5) Protecting oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams from mining wastes.

The production of a single gold ring generates, on average, 20 tons of waste. Gold mining has

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caused massive environmental destruction, contaminated fisheries and fresh water used for drinking and irrigation, and displaced tens of thousands of rural farming, fishing, and ranching communities.

"For too long, the people who are buying and selling gold have been blind to mining's impacts on the water, the air, the land, and communities like the Western Shoshone. What we're talking about is the life of future generations -- and not just Indian children, but all children," said Carrie Dann of the Western Shoshone Defense Project. "But today, some of the leading jewelry retailers are recognizing that they have a responsibility not only to their customers but also to communities affected by gold mining." Approximately half the gold produced worldwide between 1995 and 2015 has or will come from indigenous peoples' lands.

The No Dirty Gold campaign is not a boycott on gold, but is working to end destructive mining practices, educate consumers about gold mining's impacts and build consumer support for industry reform.

Copies of the New York Times ad, fact sheets about gold production and consumption, FAQs about the ad, and print-ready photos can be downloaded at: <http://www.nodirtygold.org>