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World Jewelers Move Away From "Dirty" Gold

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Eight of the world's leading jewelry retailers have united in a pledge to move away from "dirty" gold sales. The eight, which includes Zale, the Signet Group (the parent firm of Sterling and Kay Jewelers), Tiffany & Co., Helzberg Diamonds, Fortunoff, Cartier, Piaget, and Van Cleef & Arpels, are calling on mining corporations to ensure that gold is produced in more socially and environmentally responsible ways.

The No Dirty Gold campaign praises the retailers today in a full-page ad in *The New York Times*. The ad has been timed to coincide with Valentine's Day, one of the biggest jewelry buying holidays in the United States.

The No Dirty Gold campaign was launched two years ago amid growing controversy over new mine proposals and news stories detailing environmental and human rights abuses and corruption within the gold mining industry, causing many retailers to worry about their brands' reputations. Since the campaign began, more than 30,000 consumers have signed a petition urging mining corporations to clean up their act and produce gold more responsibly.

"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."

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.

"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."

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.

"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 New York Times ad, found at 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 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. This latter group comprises Rolex, JCPenney, Wal-Mart, Fred Meyer Jewelers, Whitehall Jewellers, Jostens, QVC, and Sears/Kmart.

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