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Charity Head Says Naomi Campbell Gave Him Diamonds

By CHARLES FORELLE

BRUSSELS—The then-head of Nelson Mandela’s children’s charity said he received “three small uncut diamonds” from supermodel Naomi Campbell on board a luxury train after a September 1997 dinner, but held on to them without discussing the matter with anyone else. The diamonds are an intriguing thread in the trial of former Liberian leader Charles Taylor, who is being prosecuted at a special international court for war crimes related to the brutal fighting in Sierra Leone from the mid 1990s to the early 2000s.

Ms. Campbell testified Thursday that after the charity dinner, where she met Mr. Taylor, she was awakened out of her hotel bed by two men who handed her a pouch. She testified that inside were “small dirty-looking stones.” Other guests, she said, suggested to her that they were diamonds, and from Mr. Taylor.

Prosecutors are interested in the episode because they allege Mr. Taylor funded the fighting through trade in blood diamonds. He has denied that.

What happened to Ms. Campbell’s diamonds had been a mystery. She testified Thursday that she gave them to Jeremy Ractliffe, the director of Mr. Mandela’s children’s charity, and suggested they be put to good use.

In an emailed statement Friday morning, Mr. Ractliffe said he told Ms. Campbell that he would “not involve the [Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund] in anything that could possibly be illegal.” He said he decided to keep the diamonds, and tell no one, to “protect the reputation of the NMCF, Mr. Mandela himself and Naomi Campbell, none of whom were benefitting in any way.” Mr. Ractliffe said he has turned the diamonds over to South African authorities and is willing to testify before the war-crimes court.

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