



CNRG CONDEMNS SENSELESS SUFFOCATION OF ARTISANAL MINERS

By Simiso Mlevu Posted November 23, 2020 In Campaigns, Front, Press Releases

CENTRE FOR NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE (CNRG) condemns the negligence that led to death, through suffocation, of artisanal miners who were buried alive by Belarusian and Chinese companies at Premier Estates outside Mutare.

An unspecified number of artisanal gold miners are feared to have been buried alive after a Belarusian company subcontracted a Chinese company, Zhondin Investments, to carry out as yet to be ascertained operations at Premier Estate outside Mutare. Two bodies of artisanal miners have been retrieved while some, who according to artisanal miners are close to 10, are still unaccounted for.

CNRG is shocked with the blatant violation of Human Rights which happened at Premier Estates between 11 and 13 November 2020. This incident epitomises extensive violations of human rights that have been going on in Zimbabwe's extractive sector, needlessly costing the nation scores of lives. Section 48 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees every person the right to life.

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According to eye witnesses, the subcontracted Chinese company deliberately filled artisanal miners' shafts, fully aware that there were people underground, thereby suffocating the artisanal miners to death. The heinous crime was overseen by armed Zimbabwe Republic Police Officers who were providing security to the company's operations. Police say they are not sure whether the company was doing land reclamation or mining. No sufficient precautionary measures and time were taken to ensure there were no artisanal miners in the pits.

Although the exact number of artisanal miners still trapped underground is disputed, the fact that already 2 bodies have been recovered from one of the shafts gives credence to claims by artisanal miners that more could still be trapped. The two companies and the Zimbabwe Republic Police have dismissed the claims that there are artisanal miners still trapped underground, despite sights of clothes and personal belongings left on the ground that could be evidence for missing persons. CNRG is appalled by lack of a coordinated rescue mission between the GoZ, the mining companies and artisanal miners who know the identity of their missing peers.

The continued criminalization of artisanal mining; the absence of a regulatory framework for artisanal mining; lack of trust between mining companies and local communities; coupled with corruption in access to mining claims are some of the factors that have led to this disaster. In essence, this accident also points to poor working relations between mining investors and local communities. Local communities have been fighting for benefits from their mineral resources and have always refused to vacate their mineral-rich land to pave way to mining investors.

Centre for Natural Resource Governance therefore calls on:

- The government to invite artisanal miners to assist with information on the missing persons and resume the rescue efforts which have since been called off.
- The government to gather more information from the artisanal miners who were present when the accident happened without intentions to incriminate them.
- The Parliament of Zimbabwe to protect and defend the Constitution of Zimbabwe by ensuring that investors uphold the sanctity of life enshrined in the bill of rights.
- The government to ensure that only investors with a traceable corporate identity are permitted to operate in Zimbabwe
- The government to terminate the mining permits of any corporation that violates the constitutional rights of citizens.
- Mining investors to invest in relationship building with local communities to avoid fights over resources, which can result loss of lives.
- The Environmental Management Agency (EMA) to ensure that mining investors take safety, health and environment (SHE) measures more seriously during their operations. The GoZ to enable the

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Environmental Management Agency (EMA) to competently execute its mandate by enforcing environmental rehabilitation in all the mining areas.

- The GoZ to decriminalise artisanal mining and also regulate the sector to harness the proceeds in domestic resource mobilisation.
- The Government of Zimbabwe to stop issuing special grants to investors without conducting sufficient due diligence.
- Government to respect local communities' rights to Free, Prior and Informed Consent regarding extraction of minerals from their localities.



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