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Parliament Must Investigate Aviation Industry In Zimbabwe For Facilitating Smuggling Of Precious Minerals

The executive arm of the state behind smuggling of precious minerals in Zimbabwe.

Between 2009 and 2015 government elites facilitated mostly criminal foreign entities to plunder alluvial diamonds in Marange. An estimated US\$15 billion of potential diamond revenues was lost through smuggling and externalisation. A Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mines and Energy inquest into the diamond loss was aborted in 2018 after the responsible government authorities refused to appear before the committee.

The plunder of Marange diamonds was made possible through violent mining practices that uprooted communities of Marange. Government elites provided immunity to mining entities for rampant human rights abuses on villagers, artisanal miners and mining workers. The seizure of diamond mining operations by the government in 2016 has not addressed adverse human rights impacts of previous diamond mining operations. Exposure to pollution and contamination of water bodies has given rise to diseases like Malaria, diarrhoea, Pneumonia, Tuberculosis and skin diseases to affected communities.

People suffer in silence against glaring evidence of poverty and despair. At the same time they are prone to systematic violence by state security operatives such harassment, assault, torture and murder. For the past 2 years, the government has defied a high court order to release information relating to compensation to over 3000 families at Arda Transau displaced by diamond mining in Marange. The information is important for the families to claim compensation for loss of communal land and property in Marange. The government is also evasive on addressing the issue of security of tenure for the families at Arda Transau.

It is a matter of public record that in 2018 President Mnangagwa sanctioned a police investigation on former first lady Grace Mugabe on allegations that she was heading a syndicate that was smuggling huge amounts of ivory, gold and diamonds from Zimbabwe to Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). At

least 200kgs of ivory was confiscated at the Robert Mugabe International Airport by security officials in December 2018. The nation still awaits President Mnangagwa for an update on the case. Zimbabwe has a porous and corrupt aviation security system that is facilitating smuggling at private airstrips, national and international airports.

The Henrietta Rushwaya gold smuggling case is confirmation that Robert Mugabe Airport (RMA) has a long history of systematic smuggling of precious minerals involving state security agents, aviation security officers and VVIPs. Reliable airport sources claim that State security agents were not only facilitating the smuggling of precious minerals and ivory but drugs such as cocaine and ephedrine coming from Brazil, Peru, India and other Asian Countries.

This systematic practice was also rife at Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo (JMN) and Victoria Falls International Airport. Sources further claim that domestic airports which do not have metal detectors and CCTV systems were also being used by prominent persons to fly out of Zimbabwe without being searched. Prominent names of business people linked to the ZANU PF government that are suspected of smuggling precious minerals from Zimbabwe enjoy preferential treatment from aviation officials, said the sources.

According to the government, Zimbabwe is losing about US\$1.8 billion of mineral revenues especially gold to smuggling and externalisation. The exploitation of gold in Zimbabwe is now largely controlled by ZANU PF political elites and securocrats whose actions have become a source of violence, destruction of the environment and contamination of water bodies with toxic substances.

The failure by the government to table in parliament the Gold Trade Bill and the Precious Stones Trade Bill to curb leakages of precious minerals is self-serving and unsustainable. The government is failing to meet the rights of its citizens to basic human rights standards of living because of greed and corruption. Against this background the CRD calls upon Parliament through the Portfolio Committee on Transport and Development to immediately undertake investigations into operations of private and public airports in Zimbabwe to curb systematic smuggling of precious minerals.

Parliament must force government to adequately equip all airstrips and airports in Zimbabwe with modern security equipment and adopt international best practices to curb smuggling. Parliament has an obligation to hold members of the executive to account for abusing the aviation industry to smuggle precious minerals out of Zimbabwe.