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Unsustainable diamond mining perpetuating conflicts and loss of lives in Marange

On Sunday 18 August 2019, 6 unemployed youngsters from Chareka (2), Gamunorwa (1) villages under Chief Marange and (2) from communities surrounding Marange of 35 and miles broke into Portal A under Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company (ZCDC) around 4am with the intention of mining diamonds.

One alert ZCDC security guard opened fire on the invaders leading to the death of Philemon Manhanga of Chareka village aged 27 years. The deceased sustained 5 pellets gunshot wounds all over his body according to his uncle, Witness Kagurabadza. Another survivor of the shooting, Prince Matinyadza, carried Philemon on his back for at least 65 metres away from the diamond field. Philemon died along the way to Mutambara Hospital in Chimanimani. All the 4 survivors who spoke to CRD mentioned economic challenges as reasons for their desperate attempt to enter the diamond fields. This incident comes 5 days after 3 artisanal diamond miners (Gladmore Simango, Washington Simango and Rodwell Chidziya) lost their lives when a mine shaft collapsed on them whilst mining diamonds at ZCDC's Poral B old washing plant in Marange. Meanwhile villagers in Marange face pervasive harassment and all forms of abuse by state security operatives who accuse them of harbouring artisanal diamond miners.

Under pressure from civic society organisations, government resolved to regularise artisanal diamond mining in Marange last year. The decision was announced during the 2nd multi stakeholder diamond conference on diamond security that was held in Mutare in December 2018. The government realised that promoting artisanal mining was important to increase community participation and improved human security in Marange diamond mining. Thus government made an undertaking to develop an accountable and transparent diamond policy that was going to enshrine artisanal diamond mining. However government has been evasive about artisanal diamond mining ever since the new diamond policy was approved by cabinet early this year. The new diamond policy has not been made public either.

The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mines and Energy reports from 2013 to 2018 noted with concern that there was too much political interference by the executive in the mining of diamonds in Marange. Sources at ZCDC recently confirmed to CRD that the corporate was finding it difficult to operate due to unwarranted decisions coming from political elites in government that were not transparent and accountable. Consequently, ZCDC has for the past 3 months bedeviled by operational challenges ranging from shortage of fuel to non payment of workers. Sources at the mine further highlighted that securocrats linked to the political establishment were also using their influence to cripple operations at the mine in order to justify seizures that will pave way for diamond looting. A political decision was made in the past months to allow Anjin to start mining explorations in concessions held by ZCDC without due process.

Workers at Metallon gold mine in Penhalonga also accused political elites in government for meddling in the operations of the mining giant. The company has since closed its operations in Penhalonga rendering hundreds of workers jobless. In suing government for loss of revenue in May 2019, Chairman of Metallon, Mzi Khumalo accused government's actions as "driven by corruption and a sense of impunity which he believe had no end in sight."

Against this background the CRD reiterates its call for government to expeditiously implement accountable reforms in mineral resource governance that protect business and human rights. The government has the responsibility to grow the economy and improve human rights standards of its citizens. The delay in implementing good governance practices is self-serving and unsustainable.