

Zimbabwe seizes unlicensed diamond mines

HARARE: Zimbabwe on Monday, 22 February, said it was seizing diamond companies that were operating without licenses and had spurned an offer to join a state conglomerate.



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"Today the government is taking over mines in Chiadzwa and Chimanimani," Mines Minister Walter Chidhakwa told a news conference in the capital.

"The government is hereby requesting the diamond companies to stop all operations and shut down all processes, to co-operate in the handover and takeover and to immediately vacate the mining areas without any items," he said.

Zimbabwe last year ordered diamond companies, including joint ventures with Chinese companies mining gems in the eastern Marange, to come under the aegis of the Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company government conglomerate.

The company was formed "to explore, recover and sell all diamonds in Zimbabwe" following concerns over the disappearance of diamonds and trading on the black market, leaving only little revenue trickling into state coffers.

"It has since come to our attention that the joint venture companies have been operating illegally as permits which had been granted expired and were not renewed over the last four or five years," Chidhakwa said.

The government announced plans last year to merge a total of six companies operating in Marange in the eastern Manicaland province - including one wholly-owned by the state - into a single entity.

Chidhakwa said authorities wanted to retain control over diamond regions unlike some west African countries which he said had been destabilised by rogue trading.

Zimbabwe's diamond industry has been tainted by reports of rights abuses including the killing and torture of unauthorised miners at Marange.

Reports of abuses led to a ban of gem exports from Marange between 2009 and 2011.

In recent years, the government has pinned its hopes on the diamond industry to shore up the moribund economy but was forced to revise its projections downwards as earnings fell short.

Diamonds were discovered in Marange in 2006, drawing in thousands of small-time miners hoping to get rich quickly.

The army cleared the area in late 2008, when Human Rights Watch says more than 200 people were killed.

Source: AFP

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