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Soldiers loot diamond ore in Marange during the internet blackout

In Marange, 15 ZNA soldiers armed with AK 47 rifles and accompanied by a syndicate of 30 illegal diamond miners besieged Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company (ZCDC) portal B at Mbada Hills and an area nicknamed Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) because of its rich diamond deposits around 12 midnight on 15 January 2019 and looted diamond ore that had been stockpiled there. The menacing soldiers held ZCDC guards on duty at gun point and tied their dogs together before setting their panning syndicate to fill up diamond ore in their sacks. The reaction security team called upon to contain the situation stood aloof until the looting exercise was over. The same group made an attempt on the diamond vault at the main plant the following night of 16 January 2019 around 1am. Eye witness account reported that only 8 soldiers were in uniform and the rest were in civilian clothes but armed with AK rifles. After failing to break into the sorting room the syndicate numbering up to 50 went for the stockpiled diamond ore. These rogue elements of the army were caught on CCTV camera according to security sources at ZCDC. The guards eventually managed to apprehend about 10 panners and surrendered them to the police base at the mine.

The CRD is on record for calling upon government to remove the military from Marange because of their involvement in gross human rights abuses and illegal diamond digging and smuggling. As a stop gap measure, the CRD called upon the Minister of state, Dr Gwaradzimba, during the diamond security conference held in Mutare in November last year to impress on the Minister of Defence on the need for members of the security forces operating in Marange to put on name tags so that they could easily be identified and held accountable for their criminal activities. The CRD also called upon ZCDC to hold their mining guards to account for their role in organising illegal mining syndicates. The guards are also at the forefront of committing abuses on illegal panners who enters the diamond fields without paying them. The Mnangagwa government is awarding shares to military chiefs in the exploitation of precious minerals such as platinum, diamonds and chrome to consolidate power whilst denying citizens of sustainable governance of their natural resources. In light of these criminal activities it cannot be denied that the continuous presence of the military on

rotational basis in Marange has very little to do with protecting the diamond fields. The government deliberately allowed the existence of an illegal parallel diamond mining for the lower ranks of the security sector in Marange to buy their loyalty over the years. Inside sources claimed that the rogue soldiers threatened to harm ZCDC chief security officers if they do not cooperate with their demands. They also justified their actions as pay back time for assisting President Mnangagwa to come to power according to sources at the mine. This arrangement has come at a huge cost for diamond communities who have become perennial victims of sexual abuse, harassment, murder and assault by the security establishment with total impunity.