

MEDIA STATEMENT

Illegal mining is a criminal enterprise that threatens the future of South Africa's formal mining sector

Johannesburg, August 2026. Illegal mining is a threat to the sustainability of the formal mining sector and it is associated with violence, criminality, human trafficking and environmental degradation.

Illegal mining and organised crime are inter-related. Very often, illegal mining is spearheaded by globally connected criminal syndicates.

Zama zamas, as illegal miners are known in South Africa, as well as the syndicates employing them and competing for territory are often heavily armed, have explosives and, when trespassing on operating mines, set ambushes and booby traps for employees, security personnel and rival groups of illegal miners.

Illegal mining has a range of negative social and financial impacts on the state, employees, companies, the mining sector and the country because of loss of revenue, taxes, employment opportunities, capital expenditure, exports, foreign exchange earnings and procurement, among others. The corruption of authorities and mine employees either through complicity or intimidation is a hallmark of these criminal activities.

The Minerals Council supports the pragmatic formalisation and regularisation of artisanal mining in selected communities where it is practiced. This will ensure that artisanal and small-scale miners operate within the ambit of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act as legitimate, tax paying, law-abiding entities. It is not a process that will legitimise illegal mining syndicates.

The need for dedicated legislation to define and punish illegal mining and the associated crimes is critical. Currently, illegal miners can expect to escape with a slap on the wrist after being convicted of the minor crime of trespassing. The Mineral Resources Development Bill seeks to address this point. Please click on this link for the Minerals Council's public comments on the Bill: [Minerals Council South Africa Responds to the Mineral Resources Development Bill - Minerals Council South Africa](#)

Far tougher laws and sentences, effective policing and improved crime intelligence are needed to address illegal mining and the associated criminality, and to make arrests all the way up to the leaders and masterminds of these syndicates.

Illegal mining presents a serious risk to the sustainability of the industry and its ability to contribute to a meaningful future for all South Africans. The reputational risk to South Africa



as a source of ethically mined minerals and metals is under threat. Theft of minerals and metals from existing operations as well as infrastructure theft increases the cost of mining through increased security requirements and replacement of stolen materials.

The negative impacts go beyond financial considerations, affecting the social fabric of our country.

The negative impact of illicit mining activities on nearby communities, which include rape, murder, violence, human and child trafficking to work as illegal miners or sex workers, extortion, and the degradation of values is compounded by the destruction of water sources and other environmental consequences as a result of unfettered extraction of minerals with no regard to health, safety or environmental rules that strictly apply to the formal mining sector.

No single stakeholder can address the challenge of illegal mining and collaboration is key. The industry, individually and through the Minerals Council, remains committed to working with other stakeholders in addressing this serious challenge.

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