



mineral resources & energy

Department:
Mineral Resources and Energy
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: All media
Date: 22 June 2023

DMRE STATEMENT ON THE SUSPECTED DEATHS OF 31 ILLEGAL MINERS IN THE FREE STATE

The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) has received a report that at least 31 suspected illegal miners who are believed to be Basotho nationals, have lost their lives in a ventilation Shaft 5 Virginia mine, in Welkom, Free State province.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Relations of the Kingdom of Lesotho relayed this message to the High Commission of South Africa that, on 18 May 2023, a group of suspected illegal miners died in a mine ventilation shaft which was last operational in the 1990s.

Although information on this tragic situation comes sporadically, we are doing our utmost best to act on the information, including information regarding three (3) bodies which have been reported to be retrieved and brought to the surface by other illegal miners.

Working in collaboration with the previous owners of the mine, Harmony, the DMRE inspectors have assessed the situation and determined that methane levels at the mine ventilation shaft 5 are very high. As such, it is currently too risky to dispatch a search team to the shaft. However, we are considering various options to speedily deal with the situation.

Although this is a unique and strange situation, all relevant stakeholders will endeavor to ensure that the suspected deceased illegal miners are brought to the surface.

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