



03.01.12 11:20am
by Tererai Karimakwenda

Marange robbery an inside job

It has been reported that a group of ten robbers got away with diamond ore worth millions of dollars, after they robbed a company truck that 'broke down' in the Marange diamond fields last week.

According to reports, thieves armed with an AK-47 rifle and slingshots overpowered two security guards who had been left to protect the 400 kilograms of diamond ore, and ran off into the night.

The truck belonged to Marange Resources, one of four companies operating in the Marange area and which is in partnership with the state-owned Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation. No arrests were made but a special police unit is reportedly investigating the theft.

Farai Maguwu, director of the Centre for Research and Development in Manicaland, which monitors diamond activity in the Marange area, told SW Radio Africa that there are more questions than answers regarding the "alleged robbery".

Maguwu said it is not clear how the robbers managed to carry off 400 kilograms of diamond ore or how they happened to have a weapon used by the military.

"The fact that there was an AK 47 used by the military clearly points to some connivance by those people charged with securing the area and it is no surprise," Maguwu said. "This is a very high security area where you don't expect robbers to break in without approval," he added.

But he explained that security staff are being paid meager wages and expected to protect a resource that does not benefit them. This causes them to get involved in all sorts of illegal, money-making schemes.

The deputy Minister of Mines, Gift Chimanikire, also cast suspicion on the robbery, saying it had to be an "inside job." Chimanikire told SW Radio Africa that there is night time imaging that can identify even small animals in the diamond fields where the truck broke down. He said the system would have to be disabled by someone who works there.

Meanwhile a network of diamond dealers last month suspended one of their members, who is believed to have listed diamond stones for sale from the controversial Marange district.

Martin Rapaport, who heads the computer-trading network Rapnet, said their members are going to take extreme efforts to make sure that the diamonds they offer are not from Marange.

Addressing trade members during two conference calls on the sale of Marange diamonds, Rapaport stressed that while the stones may be sold legally in India, China and many other countries, their sale to Rapnet members in the United States and European Union is illegal.

Rapaport explained that the network is considering plans to further restrict the sale of Marange diamonds, including a ban on the sale of green-tinted stones, because many diamonds from Marange are known to be that color.

He said plans to offer rewards to anyone who reports a member who violates their rules are also being considered, since the sale of Marange diamonds poses "moral and ethical" issues for the industry because they are linked to human rights abuses by the Mugabe regime. - SW Radio