



Member of the Executive Council for
Police, Roads and Transport
FREE STATE PROVINCE

MEC WILLIAM BULWANE PRESENTATION AT NCOP ON ILLEGAL MINING ACTIVITIES, 11 AUGUST 2022

Chairperson, in the Free State Gold theft and illicit mining activities, has increased exponentially since 2005. New working methods and structures were put in place against syndicates and their leaders.

We must state in this house that legalizing illicit mining is viewed as one way of mitigating the criminality associated with illegal mining activities.

Chairperson, in the Free State Province in a study that was conducted we found that 80% of Zama Zama's are foreign nationals and that the process towards formalization was too protracted and would not benefit South Africans nor end illegal mining activities.

In 2018, the South African Police Service (SAPS) initiated the **operation Knock Out** and it focused on illegal mining activities, illicit mining murder, assault, trespass and kidnapping.

Moreover, the **operation Knock Out** also included activities such as the closure of unused shafts/mines, daily disruptive operations, arrest of domain runners, Deportation of foreign nationals, confiscation of gold processing equipment and foodstuff and targeting of smelt houses.

The **operation Knock Out** was implemented in a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach inclusive of all relevant departments.



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To reinforce the work of operation, Knock Out, a priority committee on illicit mining it was established which is known as Combating Priority Committee.

The purpose of this committee is to look holistically at illicit mining, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, and the proliferation of firearms and ammunition.

This committee exists at the district level and provincial level, at the district level it sits every month, while at the provincial level it sits weekly level, to assess, monitor and do the planning.

The hotspot area in the Free State is in Lejweleputswa district and Fezile Dabi. The total arrests that were done in Lejweleputswa are 137 and Fezile Dabi 8 [in Fezile Dabi they were done yesterday] these arrests are for the period of 1st July -5th August 2022.

These operations and interventions led to the arrest of many foreign nationals Zama Zama. Linked to this we witnessed a reduction in murders and other forms of crimes in the Goldfields area. The country of origin of the foreign nationals arrested suspects, Lesotho is leading, secondly is Zimbabwe.

However, we must mention that this resulted in the illicit activities shifting Vierfontein closer to North West and Free State border including towns such as Orkney, Benoni and Springs.



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Illegal miners are categorized in different levels, which are level one

- Level one [1] those who steal and process the product underground and on the surface who sells it through the runners.
- Level two [2] and three [3] are Gold Syndicates which are secondary or intermediary runners.
- Level four [4] are local refineries and exporters whilst level five [5] are international gold smugglers.

The outcomes from **operation Knock Out**. The arrest was mainly for operators of the lower-level tiers which are operators and runners. We have 88 total cases and 61 under investigation and only 1 is withdrawn and the number of arrests is 146.

Therefore, for us to be able to effect an arrest at level four [4] and five [5] which are higher-level operators. **Operation PAPA G** was established in the 2020/2021 financial year and has been terminated.

Operation PAPA G focused on the top ten [10] Gold syndicate leaders who were identified through intelligence. The successes of **PAPA G** in July 2022 were confiscation/ seizure of:

- 152 ammunitions
- 171 explosives
- 6 firearms
- 23 Vehicles valued at R13.9 million



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- Cash seizure of R1.7 million
- 737 Gold processing Equipment items
- 517kg Gold Bearing Material

We must state that the influence of illegal miners and the syndicate leaders have a stigma on the legal mining operators and goods. Trustworthy min workers who don't want to be associated with it end up wanting to resign from work.

Another element that we observe is that Gold Syndicate leaders source their own area of activity which include protectors, illegal miners underground and on the surface, food sources, corrupt mine workers, corrupt security officials as well as corrupt SAPS members and court officials.

Illegal mining destroys the social fabric of mining. It often gives rise to prostitution, child labour and substance abuse. This has created a lucrative secondary informal syndicate market supplying commodities, including food, liquor and prostitutes among others.

In conclusion, the success of the establishment of Project Knock Out has yielded positive results in the province and the multi-disciplinary approach adopted by Free State created an enabling environment for intelligence, Detection, investigation, take down and court ready.



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Chairperson, however since the success of **operation Knock Out and PAPA G**, there's now an emerging trend which is an increase in the number of kidnappings in the area of Matjhabeng and a total number of 9 cases were reported whereby a ransom was requested.

Also, what we have observed from both operations is that a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach has proved to be a best practice that could be emulated elsewhere.

Thank you