



# NATIONAL JOINT OPERATIONAL AND INTELLIGENCE STRUCTURE [NATJOINTS]

## **National Integrated Plan on Illegal Mining Operation Vala Umgodi**

*Prevention and combating of crimes associated with  
illicit mining*



**18 March 2025**



# SCOPE

- OPERATION VALA UMGODI
  - Back Ground
  - Overview
  - Work Streams
  - Five-Pillar Approach
  - Objectives
  - Successes
- ILLEGAL MINING IN STILLFONTEIN
  - Background
  - Statistical Data on Police Deployments
  - Budget Expenditure
  - Arrests & Nationalities
  - Case Management
  - Illegal Mining Casualties and Survivors
  - Confiscations
  - Current Situation
  - Rehabilitation Progress: Stillfontein



## SCOPE



- ASSESSING VULNERABILITIES AND RESOURCE NEEDS
  - Analysis of the Vulnerable Areas
  - Resources Required to Strengthen SAPS' Efforts





## BACK GROUND



- Operation Vala Umgodi is a coordinated, NATJOINTS police-led initiative aimed at combating illegal mining and associated crimes across South Africa. Launched in November 2023, with full implementation starting on 13 December 2023, the operation is slated to continue until 31 May 2025.
- Conducted in seven provinces—Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, and Northern Cape—the operation is supported by a Central National Command Centre.
- In collaboration with various departments and institutions, including SAPS, DMRE, Home Affairs, SANDF, NPA, DCS, DSD, DoH, and DPCI, the operation targets the criminal networks and environmental degradation linked to illegal mining activities.



## OVERVIEW



- Operation Vala Umgodi is a strategic initiative to address illegal mining and its associated criminal activities in South Africa. The South African Police Service has been allocated R1,772,359,000 to acquire assets and deploy 4,302 personnel over 18 months, focusing on stabilising and normalising high-density illicit mining areas to mitigate revenue losses, environmental harm, and security threats linked to organised crime.
- The operation comprises five pillars: intelligence gathering, law enforcement, community engagement, environmental management, and inter-agency collaboration. To effectively tackle illegal mining, Operation Vala Umgodi is structured into four key work streams to focus on enhancing operational effectiveness through these pillars, aiming to restore stability and promote sustainable development in affected areas.



## WORK STREAMS



To effectively tackle illegal mining, Operation Vala Umgodi is structured into four key work streams:

- **Work stream 1: Closing of Mines and Human Settlements** - Addressing the security vulnerabilities of abandoned and operational mines to prevent unauthorised access and illicit activities.
- **Work stream 2: Law Enforcement & Prosecutions** – Strengthening the capacity of law enforcement agencies to investigate, prosecute, and dismantle criminal networks linked to illegal mining.
- **Work stream 3: Legal and Regulatory Framework** – Enhancing policies and regulations to close legal loopholes that enable illicit mining activities.
- **Work stream 4: Communication, Partnership and Community Mobilisation** – Engaging communities, industry stakeholders, and international partners to build public awareness and support for anti-illegal mining efforts.



## FIVE-PILLAR APPROACH



The operation employs a comprehensive Five-Pillar Operational Approach to combat illegal mining effectively. This intelligence-driven strategy is designed to stabilise high-crime areas and coordinate law enforcement efforts through a centralised command center.

- **Intelligence Gathering, Analysis, and Coordination** – Leveraging crime intelligence to profile and disrupt organised criminal syndicates.
- **Proactive Approach – High Visibility Policing** – Deploying law enforcement personnel to deter illegal mining activities and enhance public safety.
- **Combat Approach – Rapid Response and Hardcore Policing** – Implementing specialised tactical responses to illegal mining hotspots.
- **Reactive Approach – Detection, Tracking, and Prosecution** – Conducting thorough investigations to ensure successful prosecutions and case management.
- **Communication and Liaison** – Strengthening collaboration among government agencies, the private sector, and local communities to address illegal mining holistically.



## OBJECTIVES



The operation is driven by twelve objectives, each targeting specific aspects of illegal mining. While some areas have seen progress, challenges remain.

- **Objective One**, focused on providing crime intelligence and technical support for effective crime detection, has driven targeted, intelligence-driven operations addressing levels 3-5 of the criminal value chain. The profiling and linking of identified targets, criminal groupings, kingpins, and syndicate members have strengthened investigations and improved the likelihood of successful prosecutions. These efforts have led to significant disruptions within the criminal value chain through arrests and enhanced coordination, ultimately weakening syndicates and contributing to a more robust law enforcement response.
- **Objective Two**, focused on integrated, coordinated, and proactive policing, has shown significant results in reducing illegal mining-related crime and enhancing community safety. Collaborative efforts have disrupted criminal networks and fostered long-term stability in affected areas.



## OBJECTIVES



- **Objective Three** emphasises dismantling illegal mining and the nexus with illegal foreign nationals, yielding substantial benefits for community safety and resource protection. Similarly, **Objective Four** has successfully disrupted illegal mining activities, contributing to improved community safety and environmental stability.
- **Objective Five** has strengthened border security, significantly impacting illicit mining operations and disrupting organised crime networks. These efforts have not only curtailed illegal mining but have also contributed to national stability and community safety.
- **Objective Six** and **Objective Seven** focus on ensuring quality investigations and successful convictions, which are vital in dismantling criminal networks and restoring law and order. Although challenges persist, the outcomes of these objectives are critical for sustainable development.



## OBJECTIVES



- **Objective Eight** aims at addressing corruption and illicit financial flows, utilising intelligence-led operations to disrupt criminal activities associated with illegal mining. However, challenges faced by the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI) hinder the full realisation of this objective.
- **Objective Nine** emphasises the need to maximise the impact of sealing shafts and holes in hotspot areas. Despite mixed progress and ongoing illegal mining activity, initiatives to enhance licensing awareness and provide technical support to artisanal miners have not yet produced measurable outcomes. The efforts by Buffelsfontein Gold Mine Limited to improve security and rehabilitate select shafts show promise, yet concerns about reliance on self-regulation remain.
- **Objective Ten** highlights the scaling of interventions, with notable advancements in projects like Tweefontein in Limpopo, which is nearing completion. Conversely, the Berwick Project in the Northern Cape has stalled due to logistical challenges, exacerbated by persistent illegal mining and funding limitations.



## OBJECTIVES



- **Objective Eleven** seeks to draft the General Laws Amendment Bill, yet its lack of significant progress limits its potential impact on the regulatory framework governing illegal mining.
- **Objective Twelve** has made strides in mobilising public support for crime-fighting initiatives, fostering public-private partnerships and instilling a sense of patriotism that contributes to community safety.



## SUCCESSSES



The operation have yielded a lot of positive results since the inception in December 2023

- The number of cases adding up to **16 645** and the **20 367** arrests effected shows the efforts by the operational members in dealing with the threat
- **572** firearms (including **87** imitation/gasgun/toyguns), **13 427** ammunitions and **414** magazines have been removed from the hands of criminals
- **298** trucks, **318** vehicles and **86** big mining machineries have been removed from the operations by the members and hitting criminals where it hurt the most which is in their pockets
- A number of equipments which include **7 577** phendukas, **342** phenduka stands, **1 687** generators, **5 349** spades/shovels/picks/axes, **231** drills/grinders/welding machines, **2 529** hammers/jackhammers and **455** wheelbarrows have been taken from the zamazamas



## SUCCESSSES



- Cash of **R6 424 384** and tons, trucks, kilograms, bags, buckets and a hectare of minerals have also been confiscated. Uncut diamonds worth more than **R32 000 000** have also been confiscated
- The activities attest to the impact that the operation is having on normal crime. At least **656 280** activities were conducted by **pillar 2** and **316 504** activities were conducted by **pillar 3** of the five pillar approach.





## BACKGROUND



- On 18 October 2024, illegal miners—commonly known as Zama Zamas—began resurfacing from abandoned mines in the Orkney and Stilfontein areas of North West Province. This development was a direct response to Operation Vala Umgodi, a joint effort led by the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to combat illegal mining.
- In response to the crisis, the Minister of Police, alongside key government officials—including the Premier of North West, Provincial EXCO, Deputy Ministers of Police, SAPS National and Provincial Leadership, Home Affairs, and the SANDF Deputy Minister—visited Stilfontein. The purpose of the visit was to receive operational briefings and engage with concerned community leaders and interest groups.
- Following these engagements, a decision was made to procure the services of a Mine Rescue Team to assist in bringing trapped or sick illegal miners to the surface at Buffels Gold Mine, Shaft 11.
- The major rescue operation took place from 13 to 18 January 2025 at Stilfontein Buffelsfontein Shaft 11.



# STATISTICAL DATA ON POLICE DEPLOYMENTS

## Stillfontein Deployment Overview:

- Total Deployed: 944 police officers
- Deployment Period: August 2024 to March 2025
- Deployment Approach: Staggered deployment over eight months
  - August 2024: 153 members
  - September 2024: 81 members
  - October 2024: 81 members
  - November 2024: 170 members
  - December 2024: 192 members
  - January 2025: 89 members
  - February 2025: 104 members
  - March 2025: 74 members



# BUDGET EXPENDITURE



## Stillfontein Expenditure Breakdown: August 2024 to January 2025

- Deployment Costs: R23,673,156.20
- Overtime Costs: R9,872,326.10
- Rescue Operation Expenditure: Not incurred by the SA Police Service
- Total Expenditure: **R 33 545 482,30**

## Budget Allocation: February 2025 & March 2025

- Allocation: R 259 702



# ARRESTS & NATIONALITIES



A total of **1 826** Suspects were arrested as follows:

➤ Mozambicans	=	1 128
➤ Zimbabweans	=	473
➤ South Africans	=	26
➤ Basotho	=	197
➤ Congolese	=	01
➤ Malawian	=	01

All suspects were charge for various crimes, including:

- Illegal Mining,
- Illegal Immigrant,
- Possession of Gold Bearing Material
- Unlawful Possession of Explosives



# CASE MANAGEMENT



Month	Dockets Registered	Suspects Arrested	Dockets at Court	For Decision SPP	Dockets Back from Court	False	Method of Finalisation				
							Case withdrawn before Court	Case withdrawn in Court	Undetected	Not Guilty	Guilty
August	5	17	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
September	18	41	16	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
October	27	137	23	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
November	58	1082	49	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	4
December	80	217	77	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
January	50	277	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
February	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>1 773</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>

53 Suspects – Direct deportations



# ILLEGAL MINING CASUALTIES AND SURVIVORS

- A total of ninety-three (93) people died.
- Eighty-eight (88) people died inside the mine and the bodies brought to the surface is recorded as follows:
  - 18 August 2024 to 12 January 2025 = 10
  - 13 January 2025 to 18 January 20255 = 78
- Five (5) people passes away after they were brought to the surface:
  - Unknown = 02
  - Mozambicans = 01
  - Basotho = 02
- A total of 1826 illegal miners brought to the surface and survived:
  - 18 August 2024 to 12 January 2025 = 1 501
  - 13 January 2025 to 18 January 20255 = 325



# ILLEGAL MINING CASUALTIES AND SURVIVORS



- 8 Bodies have been positively identified & handed to the families (3 Basotho, 3 Mozambicans & 2 Zimbabweans)
- DNA samples have been taken from 84 corpses resulting in 71 DNA profiles being derived from the 84. DNA samples are still to be obtained from 2 corpses by the FSL.
- Positive Fingerprints were taken from 60 of the 93 bodies and after analysis 11 of the deceased were identified by the SAPS Crim system as having been previously arrested in RSA with 1 out the 11 being amongst one handed to the family



# CONFISCATIONS

- Gold Bearing Material = 640,8 Kg Value: +- R 46 mil
- Gold = 6,2 Kg Value: +- R 6 mil
- Cash = R 492 340
- Estimated Total Value = **R 52,49 mil**
  
- Explosives = 3 Kg
- Illegal Firearms = 01
- Ammunition = 29



## CURRENT SITUATION



- The shaft is still guarded by the members deployed for Vala Umgodi on 24 hours shift rotation
- Identifications of unidentified bodies and obtaining of DNA from family members are ongoing
- Four SAPS members were arrested and charged with Defeating the Ends of Justice as per Stilfontein CAS 170/02/2025 after the escape of **Mr James Neo Tshoedi**. The case was postponed to 2025-05-29 for legal representation.
  - The members appeared before the Stilfontein Magistrate Court on and were granted bail at One Thousand Rand (R1 000.00) each
  - SAPS is also conducting disciplinary action against the members through a departmental investigation. They are not yet suspended



## REHABILITATION PROGRESS: STILFONTEIN



- The Buffelsfontein mine is not an ownerless and derelict mining site. It is owned by Buffelsfontein Gold Mine Limited, with the majority shareholders in China and the 26% shareholders in South Africa
- The mine agreed that they have the responsibility to rehabilitate
- A directive was sent for them to explain their security plan to ensure that the mining area is always secured. They committed that their security could move in anytime and improve in all the access points and monitor and control access
- This was done because at some point the mining area must be handed over to the mining company and SAPS is not expected to continue working in the area
- The mining company will start sending messages/pamphlets underground to indicate that they are ready to commence with the rehabilitation. (at the shafts and at the nearby townships e.g. Khuma)
- Rehabilitation of Shafts 10 and 11 will take a month and other less problematic shafts will continue as per the Closure Plan.



CONFIDENTIAL



# Assessing Vulnerabilities and Resource Needs



# ANALYSIS OF THE VULNERABLE AREAS

## Affected Provinces and Key Areas:

- Gauteng: Johannesburg, Benoni, Springs, Carletonville
- Mpumalanga: Barberton, Lydenburg, Sabie, Witbank, Secunda
- Limpopo: Musina, Phalaborwa, Burgersfort
- North West: Rustenburg, Stilfontein, Klerksdorp
- Free State: Welkom, Virginia
- Northern Cape: Kimberley, Namakwaland
- KwaZulu-Natal: Newcastle, Pongola, Richards Bay

**Minerals Targeted:** Gold, Platinum, Chrome, Diamonds, Coal, Copper, Phosphates

**Specific Vulnerabilities:** Abandoned mines, difficult terrain, proximity to informal settlements, poor road infrastructure, and presence of heavily armed syndicates.



## RESOURCES REQUIRED TO STRENGTHEN SAPS' EFFORTS

To effectively combat illegal mining in vulnerable areas, the South African Police Service (SAPS) requires:

- **Human Resource Development:** Increase personnel specifically deployed to mining hotspot areas and enhance training programs tailored for physical environments such as underground tunnels.
- **Strengthening Intelligence and Technology:** Invest in drones and surveillance cameras for real-time monitoring and establish provincial intelligence units focused on mining-related crimes.
- **Equip officers with advanced IT equipment,** including laptops and smartphones, to facilitate communication and data collection in the field. Provide night vision goggles for operations conducted in low-light conditions.
- **Financial Resources:** Allocate funds to deploy specialised units, such as tactical response teams, to high-risk areas, ensuring they are equipped with necessary resources and personnel.



# Thank you