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PRESS RELEASE

MRA Condemns Attack on Mine Workers

PORT MORESBY: The Mineral Resources Authority (MRA) has condemned the killing of a Chinese national, and the wounding of another Chinese man, at an Alluvial Mining site in the Wau-Waria District of Morobe Province on July 28, 2024.

The incident which also resulted in the burning down of two excavators, happened at the Kilolo Bridge outside of Wau town, on Mining Lease for Alluvial Purposes (ML460), operated by Mi-Do Mining Company Limited (MiDo). The deceased and the wounded worker were both employed by the operator.

It is alleged that the perpetrators were a group of descendants of Tribute Block Holders, who claim to have mining rights over the old lease, which has now been converted to ML 460. The tribute block holders were miners brought in during the colonial mining days from all parts of PNG, to be tributers under ML 460 and nearby mining leases, when these leases were held by Goldfields (PNG) Limited.

The MRA's Managing Director Jerry Garry, when condemning the act of the settlers, said MiDo has a Tribute Agreement with the lease holder Biangai Development Corporation Limited (BDC), over ML 460. The converted ML 460 licence was granted and registered with the MRA on May 16, 2024, and the lease holder's tribute agreement with MiDo was approved and registered on June 27, 2024, which gives the BDC and MiDo the legal rights to operate.

"BDC was granted a Mining License for Alluvial Purpose under the Mining Act 1992 conversion provision. The ML is for a 5-year term which commenced on May 16, 2024 and will end on May 15, 2029," explained Mr Garry.

The MD said the grant of all licenses is done under very stringent processes provided for under the mining laws and that, applications go through a thorough multi-layered vetting process before a decision on whether to grant or not is made by the Mining Minister, or the National Executive Council (NEC) in the case of a Special Mining Lease (SML).

He said the MRA would fully cooperate with the Police Department in their investigations into the incident, and would ensure this sorts of incidences were prevented from recurring. He said the MRA would be conducting a separate investigation under Mining (Safety) Act 1977, and put in place conditions to protect leaseholders and developers of alluvial mining projects.

Mr Garry said: "Violence is not the way to resolving issues. The world is watching. When we resort to violence, we send negative messages to investors. It is very difficult to attract mineral exploration investment into the country at the moment."

Minerals for Life

“I appeal to all alluvial miners in the Wau-Waria District, to respect each other and resolve issues in an amicable and a civilized manner. If you can’t resolve issues, go and see MRA officers at the Small Scale Mining Training Center in Wau or the MRA officers in Port Moresby. If your issues are not resolved, the courts are there to hear your cases.”

“We offer our deepest condolences to the immediate family of the deceased.”

MRA’s Executive Manager for Regulatory Operations Division (ROD) Stanley Nekitel, said most of the leases in the Wau area were issued under the repealed Act that existed prior to the Mining Act 1992. He said the transition from the repealed Act to the Mining Act 1992, brought along these legacy issues. He said the MRA would over time resolve these issues administratively.