

MINES MINISTER SHARES HIS VISION WITH MINING COMPANIES IN KONO

Date : May 29, 2018

The Minister of Mines and Mineral Resources, Hon. Dr. Morie Manyeh, over the weekend, 25th to 27th May 2018, went on a familiarization visit to mining and exploration companies in Kono district. Speaking on the purpose of his visit, Dr. Manyeh explained that it was to acquaint himself on mining activities in Kono, and share with the companies the vision of the new direction for the minerals sector. He noted that mining has been going on in Sierra Leone for almost a century now, but that the country has very little to show for it. Mining communities particularly have been left worse off, with serious environmental and social impacts, and little or no development. This he said will all change under the new direction, as the focus of Government is to ensure that Sierra Leoneans derive maximum benefits from our mineral wealth.

During the trip, the Minister visited the mining sites of Seawright Mining Co., Koidu Limited, MEYA Mining Co., and Mourné Mining Limited, all in Kono district.

At Seawright Mining, company officials explained to the Minister that they are at an advanced stage of exploration for gold and diamonds, and that they have sent out materials from bulk sampling to external laboratories to investigate kimberlite potentials. They maintained that they are compliant with their environmental, financial and reporting obligations, and that their contributions to development include employing 151 Sierra Leoneans and supporting education and infrastructure as part of CSR.

At Koidu Limited, company official gave a brief history of the company dating back to 1995, when the previous owners started with exploration leading to open-pit mining, on to the present period during which they have transitioned to underground mining. Problems of the open pit mining included relocation, damages from blasting, and movement of people, but the company explained that these have all stopped as they are now operating underground. They however maintained that they will continue with the relocation programme, which has been delayed due to cash flow problems. The company employs 803 Sierra Leoneans. The Minister and his team were taken on a conducted tour of the underground mining site.

At MEYA mining, officials explained that their exploration licence covers four chiefdoms in Kono, and that they are currently doing bulk sampling to develop a resource statement, which they will use to raise the necessary capital to transition into large-scale mining. The results from the bulk sampling are however very encouraging, as it was from this activity that they recently uncovered the 476 carat diamond, which was sold for over US\$ 16 million. The company employs over 50 Sierra Leoneans, has expended over US\$ 500,000 in crop compensation, and is engaged in CSR activities. Community issues include discontent over involuntary movements during blasting and noise pollution, among others.

At Mourné mining, the Management explained that they are engaged in ground exploration work and conducting alluvial tests, and they have identified three potential alluvial deposits. Sample tests for kimberlite within the exploration area have also yielded positive results, and the company was optimistic that they would soon transition to full mining. The company currently has 21 staff, of which 19 are Sierra Leoneans.

In his message to the respective companies, the Minister assured them that the New Direction is all

about improving the way we do things to ensure that Sierra Leone becomes a better place for everyone. He advised the companies that if they want to be friends of Government, they must continue to pay their taxes, raise revenue for Government; be fully compliant with all their obligations, operate responsibly and protect the environment, and improve the welfare of the people living in the communities where they operate. The Minister admonished the companies to note that local content is not just about employing Sierra Leoneans, but it is also about training and capacitating them, and employing them at senior management level; and in this regard, he called on them to forward their respective staff lists and organograms to his office for review. He said that Government will soon review the 2009 Mines and Minerals Act to make it more responsive to modern day realities and to be a more effective instrument to guarantee benefits for the people of Sierra Leone.

The focus of the New Direction, he went on, is all about revenue generation, providing free education, employment, and improving the welfare of local communities, and Dr. Manyeh called on the companies to come on board and support Government in this New Direction.

The Minister was accompanied by the Director General of the National Minerals Agency, Mr. Sahr Wondag; the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Mines, Mrs. Fatmata Mustapha; and other Directors and senior staff of the NMA and the Ministry of Mines.

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