



Media release: immediate

Thursday 31 May 2012

**No further trapped diggers, or illegal diggings, found at Bontekoe.**

**Search completed by authorities; rescue and recovery operation ends.**

De Beers confirmed today that the authorities had returned the Bontekoe illegal digging site to the management of the Company thereby bringing to an end a comprehensive rescue and recovery operation.

The Company leadership and the various rescue and recovery team members expressed their condolences to the families of the ten diggers who died when the illegally excavated diggings collapsed on Tuesday 22 May. One trapped digger was rescued from the site. An unconfirmed number of diggers absconded from the site at the time of the collapse.

Phillip Barton, the CEO of De Beers Consolidated Mines stated; "The loss of life in illegal digging is even more tragic in that it is completely avoidable. Excavating one's own illicit diamond digging is an action endangering one's own life. It is an act damaging to one's own family and community. The illegal excavations are by their nature uncoordinated, not properly designed or planned and will always be prone to collapse. The illegal diggers are paying the ultimate price for the benefit of a few illicit diamond traders. The solution may rest collectively with a multiplicity of stakeholders yet the will to change ultimately belongs to individuals involved and benefitting from these illegal activities."

Late yesterday the South African Police Services (SAPS), SAPS members of the rescue and recovery team and the support teams, witnessed by a local government and community representative inspected the excavations and the exposed face of the excavated site. It was agreed that all the illegally excavated tunnels had been exposed and that no further bodies remain trapped at the site. The area has no abandoned mine tunnels, all tunnels at Bontekoe had been illegally excavated. Namaqualand Mines is an alluvial mining operation, not an underground mine. It was confirmed that no trapped miners or tunnels were to be found at the site of the diggings. The SAPS declared the rescue and recovery operation closed and removed their "crime scene" classification of the site.

The area will continue to be excavated and the gravels will be secured at a safe place. The SAPS will maintain a presence at the site.

The investigation associated with the illegal diggings is a SAPS matter.

**Contact for the SAPS:** Warrant Officer Peters 079 112 4481

**De Beers Media Contact for the Northern Cape:**

Abel Madonsela +27 (83) 554 8777 [Abel.Madonsela@debeersgroup.com](mailto:Abel.Madonsela@debeersgroup.com)