

Abuja Residents Cry Out Over Illegal Mining, Life-threatening Rock Blasting

By Yemi Oyeyemi, Abuja.

Some occupants and property owners in the Guzape area of the Federal Capital City have sent a 'Save our Soul' (SOS) message to the Minister, Nyesom Wike and relevant government agencies over what they described as 'life-threatening' blasting of rocks in the area. The complaint is coming against the backdrop of what appears to be the unrestricted mining of precious rock formations in many parts of the Federal Capital Territory. From Mpape to Kubwa, Guzape, and other far flung parts not visible to many residents, there have been whispers of mining activities which government officials have turned a blind eye to, some say, for pecuniary benefits. Reports trace this development to more than 34 years ago when the International Conference Centre was built and a major construction company was alleged to have mined rocks in its constructions. Since

at the verge of the court granting this order, we discovered various extraneous interest building up thereby introducing legal technicalities delaying the course of justice. "The suit within this period has witnessed three adjournments after days of delay before being assigned to a judge. "The case has been adjourned till April 16, 2024". The residents noted that while it is their desire for infrastructural development to come to Guzape District, they maintained that such development should not be at the risk of their lives. Citing Section 17(1)(b) of the 1999 Constitution which provides for the dignity of the human person, the residents asked: "Of what importance is road construction when the human beings that are supposed to stay therein are dead or living in fear of heart failure sequel to incessant earth tremor?" They claimed that by going ahead with the



blasting, Gilmor Construction is infringing on their fundamental human right to life under Section 33 of the Constitution.

"It should be noted that, what Gilmor is doing within the site falls within the meaning of "act of blasting" under Section 43 relating to interpretation of words. It is very unfortunate that Gilmor as required by these Regulations had failed to use environment friendly technology which provide a minimum harm to the environment and human health in all the blasting that Guzape district had witnessed.

then, there have been allegations of illegal mining and exploitation of rocks against companies of German, Turkish, Chinese, and other foreign descents. Some Nigerians and companies are said to be also involved. Abuja residents in the high-brow Guzape District lament that the blasting of rocks there is allegedly being carried out by Gilmor Construction against laid-down laws and regulations and a pending court case. Addressing journalists in Abuja on behalf of residents of the district, a former Deputy Governor of Kogi State, Simon Achuba, who acknowledged that "the purpose of the blasting is for the construction of road for the development of Guzape District", pointed out that "it is only the living that can enjoy amenities".

Achuba while noting that Nigeria is a member of the International Treaty and Conventions on explosives and blast technique submitted that Gilmor alongside her foreign nationals ought to have been accustomed with the law. "For about three months, we noticed with tremor incessant blasting of rocks very close to our residential accommodations contrary to statutory regulations governing blasting of rocks either for construction or mining exercise. "At any point the blasting is done, the whole residential houses within the vicinity of the blasting site shake thereby injuring the integrity of these properties and the life of our wives and children staying within these premises," he stated. He added that the construction company failed to heed caution from the police that it observes regulatory guidelines for blasting. The residents further claimed that when some of them approached the court for a restraining order to stop "further damage and innocuous blasting,

"Consequently, the act and negligence of Gilmor offends the provisions of Section 12 which controls permissible noise, where there is an emission of excessive noise by the activities of a person, such conduct is punishable under the provisions of National Environmental (Noise Standard and Control Regulations 2009).

"Finally, as a construction company Gilmor is bound by the provisions of National Environmental (Construction Sector) Regulations 2011 which provides for guidelines to be obeyed in relations to the health, welfare and safety of life and property during construction exercise. "Section 16 of the Regulations provides that "Any operator whose activities involve blasting shall do so in accordance with Schedule ix to these Regulations, hence Gilmor has failed to observe the rules in paragraphs (1)(2)(3)(5), Gilmor has failed to ensure use of appropriate blasting design and procedure. "In view of all these infractions and flagrant disrespect to the rule of law and statutory regulations, we are calling on NESREA, Ministry of Mines and Solid Minerals Development, Federal Ministry of Environment and FCDA to forthwith stop these incessant hazardous blasting which is injurious to our lives and properties. "It is only the living that can enjoy amenities. Nigeria is a member of International Treaty and Conventions on explosives and blasting technique, during the last World Conference on explosives and blasting in 2022 in Netherlands, emphasis was laid on international best practice, which Gilmor with her Foreign Nationals should be accustomed with," the residents added.