

Nigeria losing \$9bn to illegal mining annually

... House of Reps



The House of Representatives Committee on Solid Minerals said the country loses \$9 billion annually to illegal mining. The Chairman of the committee, Jonathan Gaza, who stated this at a public hearing on illegal mining in the solid mineral sector, said the development is militating against the development of the sector. Gaza explained that conflict over the control of mining sites by illegal miners often escalates into violence and insecurity generally. Consequently, he said there was a need to take urgent steps to address the issue in the overall benefits of the country. "The unregulated exploitation of our natural resources jeopardizes the sustainability of the mineral sector, leading to environmental degradation and revenue loss that could otherwise benefit our communities and nation as a whole. "It is imperative that we take, as a matter of urgency, decisive steps and necessary action to address this issue and ensure that our solid mineral sector operates within the framework of the law, protecting our natural resources for future generations. Furthermore, as representatives of the people, the parliament is deeply worried about the loss of revenue through unregulated and illicit mining operations, with the Federal Government disclosing that unlawful mining costs the country \$9 billion each year, with the only money coming from a three percent royalty paid by the few licensed miners," Gaza stated. He added: "Allow me to state, emphatically, that the time is now for us to work collaboratively and take immediate and decisive actions to revitalize and develop this critical sector for the overall

benefit of all Nigerians, while preserving our environment for future generations."

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Christopher Musa, while speaking at the investigative hearing, said the illegal miners often boast about their connections. The CDS, who was represented by the Director, Operations, Air Vice Marshal Nnaemeka Ignatius Ilo, said foreigners were also involved in illegal mining in the country. He said: "The leader of the house made mention of something about banning mining for like a year. It is very key we do that. Ban mining all across for one year. I know the country is going to, somehow, feel the

effects in terms of revenue, but we need to go a little off the line, in order to ensure that we get things right, so that we can decisively deal with those involved in this illegal mining. "Then one thing we notice also is that, whether it's coincidence or what, we can't say, but we notice that insecurity thrives where this illegal mining is happening. Someone once said that the issue of banditry and terrorism is like a smokescreen to stop the governments and the military from dealing decisively with these people. I can't, for sure, ascertain that fact, but I know full well that there is a correlation between insecurity and illegal mining. On the issue of involvement of foreigners, we have foreigners involved in this illegal mining. "The involvement of the elites in it, we can't tell, but we know that most of the time, when we catch these foreigners, they will tell us that they have connections. I don't want to say some things, but, sometimes, you hand these people over, and the next thing you see them released. We have as far as people from Burkina Faso coming to mine in Nigeria. So, the strength of our borders, too, is a factor. Why I'm saying all this is that there's a need for the government to equip, properly, those involved, to checkmate most of this illegal mining. "There is a need for the government to equip them properly and, also, give them the marching order. Its one thing to say and another thing to see that the government is really committed to dealing with people. Anybody caught in this illegal mining must be dealt with decisively, and examples should be made for others to know, publicly, that this is what the government is doing, to ensure that we tackle that area."

The CDS added: "So, what is the way forward? The way forward, from our own view, is that, one; we have to strengthen the regulatory framework for these mining activities. And, also, empower the agencies involved in checking mining activities for them to do their work. We could go into this banning of mining for a year or two, and, then, probably get the acts right. "Anybody seen committing illegal mining will be dealt with decisively. In 2011, in Liberia, this same issue we are facing in Nigeria was obvious in Liberia. The international community was approached after they had seen the atrocities of things done. And that's when the issue of blood diamonds came up. What did they do? They banned the Liberia diamond in the international community." On his part, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt General Taoreed Lagbaja, while speaking at the hearing, said no fewer than 387 people have been arrested for alleged involvement in illegal mining activities between January and July, 2024.

them over to those agencies to continue with the prosecution aspect. As contained in the memo, from December to date, we've arrested 387 individuals in connection with illegal mining. We also have vehicles and some of these minerals were arrested and handed over as exhibits to those agencies for them to be prosecuted. "In summary, I could say from December till date, in Abia, we have 10 people arrested, in Ebonyi State, we have 12, in the Federal Capital Territory and its environs, I mean places like Kuje, Gwagwalada, Bwari and co, and we've arrested 276 individuals, while in Osun State we've arrested 19. In Oyo, particularly in the northern part of Oyo State, where they share a boundary with Kwara State, those places that are very close to old Oyo National Park, we've arrested around 55 people ..."

Earlier, the speaker, Tajudeen Abbas, while declaring the hearing open, said illegal mining has huge implications on the economy of the country. The speaker, who was represented by



Lagbaja, who was represented by the Deputy Director, Operations, Army Headquarters, Colonel Tajudeen Lamidi, said "what we do, basically, is to support those agencies that are constitutionally mandated to protect the critical national infrastructure of the country, including mining. "And, in doing that in our operations, we have to contend with illegal miners, and what we do is after arresting them, we hand them over to the appropriate agency available in that area. Some of these agencies include the Department of State Security Services, the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps.

"Sometimes, we conduct operations together, where we go to some of these illegal mining sites and conduct operations because the Nigerian Army cannot prosecute them; we hand

the Majority Leader, Julius Ihonbvere, expressed optimism that the outcome of the investigation will guide the House in proffering legislative solution to the challenge. He said: "Available reports indicate that an estimated 80% of mining in the North West region, for example, is carried out illegally, and the mining of large untapped mineral deposits in the area is the root of community violence. It is the same story in many parts of the nation. The House considers illegal mining as an economic sabotage and accords this investigative hearing a priority, especially because many communities with mineral deposits, which should ordinarily be a blessing to them, live in agonizing conditions, economically and socially, arising from years of neglect, and various deprivations and severe environmental degradation, air and water pollution, due to the activities of illegal miners."