

Reuters: At Least 100 Feared Dead in Zamfara Gold Mine Collapse

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.WAPCo warns of imminent danger as illegal mining threatens gas pipeline

Peter Uzoho

At least 100 people are feared dead following the collapse of a gold mining pit in Zamfara State, survivors and residents disclosed yesterday.

This was as West African Gas Pipeline Limited (WAPCo) has raised the alarm over continued illegal mining along its pipeline network, cautioning that the activity poses serious safety and environmental hazards.

The pit at the Kadauri mining site in the Maru Local Government Area caved in on Thursday while scores of artisanal miners were working underground, witnesses told Reuters. Rescue operations continued into yesterday.

Sanusi Auwal, a local resident involved in rescue efforts, said at least 13 bodies had been retrieved from the rubble, including that of his cousin.

“Over 100 miners were involved during the collapse,” Auwal told Reuters by phone.

“We are lucky to be rescued alive. Out of more than 100 people, only 15 of us were rescued,” said Isa Sani, who is currently receiving treatment for injuries.

Muhammadu Isa of the Zamfara State Miners Association confirmed the incident, adding that some rescuers also suffocated while trying to dig out victims.

Zamfara Police Spokesperson, Yazid Abubakar, did not immediately respond to calls and text messages seeking comment.

Illegal mining is common in Zamfara, where armed gangs often control gold fields, fuelling violence and deadly accidents.

Meanwhile, Country Head, External Relations (Nigeria), WAPCo, Temitope Sodeinde, issued the warning during the company’s Annual Sand Mining Workshop held in Lagos.

Sodeinde stressed that illegal sand mining along the pipeline’s right-of-way had resulted in hazardous pits up to five metres deep, threatening the structural integrity of the pipeline.

He noted that multiple excavators and tipper trucks were operating simultaneously, encroaching on established boundaries.

“The company is deeply concerned about the safety of illegal miners operating dangerously close to the pipeline, which poses significant risks to both the community and their livelihoods.

“We are working closely with security agencies to monitor and protect the pipeline,” Sodeinde said.

He stated that the Police, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and other security agencies had pledged to arrest those involved in illegal mining along the pipeline network.

“This is a high-pressure gas pipeline buried underground. We regularly hold town hall and pipeline awareness meetings to educate communities about the dangers.

“Mining activities close to the pipeline risk a catastrophic fire or explosion if disturbed,” he said.

He warned that even a small mistake could lead to disaster, putting lives and property at serious risk.

Chairman of Yewa Zone Miners, Balogun Moshood, admitted that illegal mining has caused environmental damage but maintained that most miners under their umbrella were duly registered.

Moshood further alleged that some illegal miners operate with the connivance of security personnel.

“We are educating and monitoring our members to avoid mining near the gas pipeline.

“We will direct them to stop all activities close to the pipeline and maintain the required 100-meter safety distance,” he noted.

Also speaking at the event, Area Commander of Agbara Police, ACP Folashade Tanaruno, urged illegal miners to cease their activities or face arrest.

She stressed that miners must maintain at least 100 meters distance from the pipeline to avoid potential explosions.

Area Commander of the NSCDC, Mrs. Esther Odesanya, confirmed that security agencies had stepped up surveillance and would continue to arrest illegal miners.

She also urged all miners to obtain proper mining certificates before operating in the area.

The Oloja-Ekun of Igbesa Kingdom, Oba Abdul-Aziz Akinde, condemned illegal mining, calling it an act of economic sabotage and a grave threat to communities along the pipeline.

Represented by Oba Nasir Olayemi, the Olodan of Odan, cautioned residents against allowing illegal miners to operate near the pipeline.

He said, “The palace has petitioned the Federal Government and established a committee to verify miners’ licenses.

“There is no excuse for violating legal frameworks. We are collaborating with law enforcement to ensure proper action is taken.