

## Evacuation order issued to illegal miners

### ■ SURINAME/CMC

THE Suriname Police Force (KPS) has given illegal miners until Friday to leave the areas of the Chinese-owned Zijin/Rosebel Gold Mines (RGM), where a fatal accident recently occurred.

The police said that the area must be completely vacated by 8:00 am (local time) on Friday and that all illegal miners must dismantle their camps and take all personal belongings and materials with them. They said after the evacuation, the area must remain empty.

But one legislator, Edgar Sampie, is asking the authorities to reconsider the position, warning of the social consequences of a forced evacuation.

Sampie, a member of the General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP), which is one of five parties that signed an agreement with the National Democratic Party (NDP) to form the government last year, said many gold miners have worked in the area for years and have made significant investments.

'There are people who have built houses, purchased machinery, and see this work as their permanent source of income,' Sampie told the online publication Starnieuws, adding that the proceeds from the mine have been used to provide for their families, pay school fees, pay off debts, and build their futures.

'Some even have cars on instalments and houses under construction,' Sampie said, even as she acknowledged that the gold miners involved don't fundamentally deny that they are operating on concession land.

She said that while they acknowledge that the concession rights belong to Zijin, they are asking the government for clarity on the follow-up process.

'The big question is: what happens to these people if they are evicted? How will they be accommodated?' she asked, urging dialogue.

She warned: 'If you remove this group without an alternative, I fear that crime will increase-not only in Paramaribo, but also in the interior and elsewhere in Suriname.'

'We don't want that. And we also don't want a confrontation between citizens and the authorities, the police, or the military,' she said, hinting that agreements could be made with Zijin on protocols, demarcated zones, or alternative areas where the gold miners could operate under clear conditions.

The ABOP legislator said that while she had no authority to stop the eviction, she would try to persuade the ministers of justice and police, and of natural resources, to meet with representatives of the gold miners. 'The government must be willing to listen to these people and work together to find a solution that is supported by both sides,' she said.

Last month, Natural Resources Minister David Abiamfofo described the existing situation at the mines as 'unacceptable and very serious'.