

STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE THE PRIME  
MINISTER IN BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT  
ON TUESDAY, 25TH MARCH, 1969

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I take the opportunity of addressing this House to clarify the position in regard to the diamond diggers at Kao and Lihobong. For some time now I have been gravely disturbed and concerned about the diggers' failure to co-operate with the Government in settling this question of granting licences for diamond digging.

The diggers' failure to apply for and obtain licences to dig for diamonds renders them liable to serious penalties under the law for being in unlawful possession of diamonds. So far, the Government has refrained from making any arrests because it wants to settle this matter peacefully.

I fully realise that for many of our people, digging for diamonds is the only means of earning a livelihood for themselves and their families. It is not my intention to deny them this opportunity to earn a living. But this does not give them a right to earn that living illegally. That is why I have to impress upon you not only the need to resolve this embarrassing situation immediately, but also the fact that diamonds are the property of the whole nation and their exploitation must be for the general good of the country. I must also draw your attention to the fact that the whole world is interested in diamonds. This makes it essential for Lesotho to exercise proper control over diamond dealings. Without such control, the country will lose valuable revenue and our people will pay heavily for any negligence by Government in this regard.

It will be recalled that originally the Government had instructed all the diggers to go to their Chiefs and obtain from the latter letters identifying their citizenship and also recommending them for licences. Through the Assistant Minister in Butha-Buthe the Government compromised with the diggers and agreed that they should fill out the forms from where they were presently situated and the Government would then take the responsibility of ascertaining their identity from the Chiefs. After this licences would be granted. Unfortunately many of the diggers failed to co-operate with Government even in this regard.

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