

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON
LETSENG-LA-TERAI

What happened at Letseng-la-Teral last Thursday is deeply disturbing to every responsible citizen in this country. The Minister of Finance went up to the diggings to explain to everyone concerned, Government's policy and intentions for the future of the diamond mining industry. He was met by a hostile mob, which absolutely refused to listen to him, and which later attacked the police with firearms. Fortunately the police suffered no casualties, but one civilian was injured. The police had no difficulty in dispersing the mob and making arrests. Investigations are proceeding.

This is not, however, the end of the matter. It is Government's firm intention to make sure that our few known natural resources - of which diamonds are among the most important - are exploited to the best advantage and to the benefit of the whole nation. It cannot tolerate wasteful and haphazard exploitation by a few individuals for their own enrichment. Government is ready and anxious to explain its policies, and even to consider sympathetically the problems of those individuals who may feel that their personal interests are being subordinated to national interests. But no Government can tolerate unreasoning and violent obstruction, inspired by a mixture of political opportunism and personal greed. We are not ignorant of the sinister influences which have played cynically upon the ignorance and avarice of more simple men - and which culminated in last week's deplorable hooliganism. We must act to protect the nation's resources, the peace of our country, and the physical safety of ordinary citizens.