

Zimbabwe takes heart from Antwerp trial sale of gems

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Zimbabwe is planning a second auction of its Marange diamonds next February, buoyed by the interest in and sale of more than 279,000 carats of diamonds in Antwerp, Belgium. The sale raked in US\$10.7m.



An illegal diamond dealer in Zimbabwe holds gems from Marange mine. Zimbabwe has stopped illegal mining and is now selling its diamonds in Antwerp. Image: [Human Rights Watch](#)

The country's mines and mining development permanent secretary, Francis Gudyanga, said the initial sale of the Marange gemstones had provided insights and tangible guidelines that would allow the Zimbabwe government to fully optimise a second, larger tender of Marange gems.

"The next sale is scheduled for February," Gudyanga said.

The European Union lifted sanctions on Zimbabwean diamonds in September, making way for the first-ever sale of the Marange diamonds in Antwerp, which is regarded as the world's diamond capital.

Gudyanga pointed out that the auction of the Marange diamonds in Belgium would take place alongside regular sales organised by the Zimbabwean state, which have traditionally attracted scores of Indian and Chinese buyers.

More sales in Antwerp next year

"The idea for a trial tender of Marange diamonds was to enable government and industry stakeholders to make a thorough assessment of the benefits of selling rough diamonds on the open Antwerp market alongside the regular tenders that are organised in Zimbabwe," Gudyanga said.

An estimated that at least 115 buyers had shown interest in the Marange diamonds during the sale, compared with the 10 or 15 companies that attend regular auctions in Zimbabwe.

Finance Minister Patrick Chinamasa, in his budget statement, indicated that Zimbabwe's treasury would increase mining royalties from 10% to 15% as the cash-strapped government tries to grow its revenue base.

Other measures set to be introduced in the diamond industry include closed-circuit TV surveillance of the entire process of production, sorting and transportation of diamonds.

Diamond production in Zimbabwe has from 1,3m carats in 2009 to 12-million carats in 2012. Chinamasa says the Zimbabwe economy is expected to grow by 6.1% next year, based on a strong performance from the mining and agriculture sectors.

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