

De Beers' image loses lustre over San land dispute

Diamond giant De Beers, who announced an advertising partnership with supermodel and businesswoman Iman at the 55th Cannes Film Festival, has denied reports that she has pulled out in protest over the alleged treatment of the San people in Botswana.

The reports surfaced when she failed to attend the launch of a new shop and diamond range in London last week. During the week about 50 protesters gathered outside the new store, and a hoarding covering that had an image of Iman on it was defaced with the picture of a San woman with the slogan "The Bushmen aren't Forever".

However, Alain Lorenzo of De Beers says that Iman, the wife of David Bowie, phoned him to say that she couldn't attend owing to family problems. He says that she is definitely still contracted to De Beers.

Iman's image is still being used on the company's website and in their commercial advertising. The supermodel was reportedly paid £1-million to be the new face of De Beers' advertising campaign.

The Botswana government has been strongly criticised by the charity Survival International, which campaigns for the rights and protection of tribal people, for moving thousands of San people off land at Gope. A large diamond deposit was discovered there 15 years ago, but De Beers, who own the mining rights over the land, say that they have no intention of mining in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve as the stones found there were of poor quality. De Beers' lawyers have written to Survival International saying that they "cannot ignore the sustained campaign against it and misleading information damaging the company's reputation".

De Beers maintains that the forced removal of the people has nothing to do with the diamond deposits, while the Botswana government says that the San are being moved to where they can get proper medical facilities and water.

Iman stated in August that she was going to first find out the truth behind the controversy before deciding how to respond to the pressure to quit the campaign.