



# BUSINESS & HUMAN RIGHTS+



<https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu>

GUARDIÃO DA DEMOCRACIA

[www.cddmoz.org](http://www.cddmoz.org)

Tuesday, April 7, 2026 | Year IV, n.º 54 | Director: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga | English

REFRAMING “ILLEGAL MINING” IN MOZAMBIQUE

## Security, human rights and the political economy of artisanal mining

- Mozambique participated, between March 24 and 26, in London, in the plenary meeting of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPSHR), through a high-level and multi-sectoral delegation led by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Prof. Dr. Mateus Saize, and which included representatives from the Ministry of National Defence and other State institutions, reflecting a growing recognition of the need for integrated responses to the challenges at the intersection of security and human rights in extractive contexts.



Over three days, and based on experiences from diverse extractive contexts globally, it was possible to foster rich reflections on the main challenges in security, human rights, and governance of natural resources, with a particular focus on the dynamics between state actors, companies, and communities. The discussions allowed for the identification of recurring risks, the sharing of implementation lessons, and the highlighting of the need for more integrated, participatory, and sensitive approaches to local contexts.

The Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD), in its capacity as the national secretariat of the Initiative in Mozambique, participated in the event and followed with particular attention the growing concerns among Initiative members regarding the expansion of illegal mining.

The discussions brought to light divergent interpretations of the phenomenon among differ-

ent stakeholders, converging, however, on the urgency of addressing it. For extractive companies, illegal mining is seen primarily as a threat to the safety of operations and the economic viability of projects, requiring responses focused on controlling and protecting concession areas.

On the other hand, for civil society and local communities, so-called “illegal” mining is often understood as a survival strategy resulting from economic exclusion, loss of access to land, and a scarcity of livelihood alternatives. This divergence underscores the need for more balanced approaches that integrate not only safety concerns but also the social, economic, and human rights dimensions that underlie the phenomenon.

Given the relevance and timeliness of this topic in the national context, this text summarizes the main contributions made by CDD within the framework of the plenary discussions on the matter.

## Rethinking “illegal mining”

The term “illegal mining” is widely used, especially in the business sector, but it is analytically problematic. From the perspective of civil society, it is not a neutral term. It often obscures the structural causes of the phenomenon and can legitimize responses that prioritize control over the protection of rights.

While it is acknowledged that some of the actors involved in concession areas are linked to organized crime networks, this is only one dimension of the problem. A more in-depth analysis, both in Africa and in Mozambique in particular, reveals that many of those involved are displaced economic actors, including:

- Former land users whose agricultural or artisanal mining livelihoods were disrupted by the expansion of concessions;
- Individuals who operate in the absence of viable economic alternatives;
- Participants in informal, but socially rooted economies.

This understanding implies a change in the analytical framework:

- From crime to structural exclusion;
- From the coercive application of law to the dynamics of subsistence and governance;
- From threat to socioeconomic vulnerability.

This implies that illegal mining cannot be understood solely from a security perspective. In many cases, it reflects deeper structural pressures, including limited livelihood opportunities, the disruption of traditional land-use systems, and contested access to natural resources. In this sense, it must be addressed not only as a matter of law enforcement, but as a broader governance challenge situated at the intersection of security, resource control, and socioeconomic exclusion, requiring more integrated and context-sensitive responses.

## From securitization to governance: a tripartite approach

Addressing the challenges associated with illegal mining requires moving beyond unilateral approaches focused solely on security, and towards more integrated, governance-oriented models.

As the national secretariat of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VP-SHR) in Mozambique, CDD has increasingly recognized the relevance of a tripartite approach in responding to complex governance challenges linked to extractive activities. Inspired by experiences and best practices emerging in other regions of Africa, this approach offers a more balanced and sustainable path.

At its core, the tripartite model brings together:

- State institutions;
- Companies in the extractive sector;
- Communities and civil society.

This framework seeks to balance security imperatives with human rights obligations and local socio-economic realities, while creating space for dialogue, trust-building, and negotiated solutions.

Empirical evidence on the ground strongly supports this approach. In recent months, CDD,

in collaboration with local partners, has been directly involved in affected districts in Mozambique. This grassroots work has been fundamental in deepening the understanding of the phenomenon, revealing that illegal mining is embedded in a complex ecosystem characterized by:

- Historical processes of land expropriation;
- Limited livelihood options;
- Informal and cross-border economic networks;
- Fragility of local governance structures;
- Asymmetrical power relations between communities and concession holders.

These findings lead to a central conclusion: illegal mining is not just a human rights issue. It is a structural challenge of political economy.

Recognizing this reality represents a significant shift in public policy. Efforts to combat illegal mining must directly address its structural factors and not rely solely on repression or containment strategies. An effective response requires integrated solutions that link security, development, and human rights, anchored in inclusive governance models and sustained mechanisms for multisectoral engagement.



**MISSÃO:**  
*Inspirar e impulsionar ações para proteger os direitos humanos, fortalecer a democracia e promover a justiça.*


**MISSION:**  
*Inspiring and driving actions to protect human rights, strengthen democracy, and promote justice.*



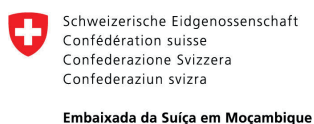
**EDITORIAL INFORMATION**

**Property:** CDD – Centro para Democracia e Direitos Humanos  
**Director:** Prof. Adriano Nuvunga  
**Editor:** André Mulungo  
**Author:** CDD  
**Layout:** CDD

**Address:**  
Rua Dar-Es-Salaam Nº 279, Bairro da Sommerschild, Cidade de Maputo.  
Telefone: +258 21 085 797

 CDD\_moz  
**E-mail:** [info@cddmoz.org](mailto:info@cddmoz.org)  
**Website:** <http://www.cddmoz.org>

**FINANCING PARTNERS**



Embaixada da Suíça em Moçambique

