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Twenty-two people have been killed following a landslide at a small-scale mine in northern Tanzania, government officials said.

The accident occurred at the Ng'alita mine in the Bariadi district of Simiyu region, Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan said on Sunday, expressing "great sadness" at the loss.

"These brothers of ours were small miners in this area, earning a living for themselves, their families and contributing to the development of our nation," she said in a post on the social media platform X.

Faustine Mtitu, acting commander for the region's fire and rescue force, told AFP news agency that rescue operations closed on Sunday and all 22 deceased were men.

"We are convinced that there are no more bodies trapped in the rubble," he said, adding that safety procedures had not been followed at the mine.

The accident happened early on Saturday after a group of people aged between 24 and 38 years old started mining in an area where activity had been restricted due to ongoing heavy rains, Simon Simalenga, the region's Bariadi district commissioner, told Reuters news agency.

"Initially we were told that there were 19 to 20 people who were trapped in the mines, but unfortunately we ended up retrieving 22 bodies," he said.

Simalenga said the group had discovered an area rich in minerals around two to three weeks prior and moved to start mining before the government had approved physical and environmental safety and procedures.

The group defied the order, he added, starting to mine late on Friday before part of the area caved in and buried them inside.

Mining accidents are not uncommon, with workers often lacking the tools and materials

considered necessary to operate safely.

Torrential downpours in the country since December have also led to landslides and floods in the region, adding obstacles to miners.

The government has worked for years to improve safety for small-scale miners, but unsafe and unregulated illegal mining still occurs in Tanzania, which is Africa's fourth-largest gold producer after South Africa, Ghana and Mali.

Source: Al Jazeera

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