

Mining Activities Adversely Affecting Villages in Limpopo

On a recent visit to Limpopo to look at mining and communities, our delegation of church leaders were shocked by the conditions under which communities have to live.

Contrary to popular belief that mining brings enormous benefits to communities, recent evidence suggests otherwise. The Bench Marks Foundation and the provincial branch of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in Limpopo have noted with great concern the disastrous impact of some mining companies on local village life and the environment.

We witness worsening social and environmental conditions in this platinum producing area. These conditions, resulting from the mining activities of Anglo Platinum and Impala Platinum, are causing great distress in local communities who live in close proximity to mining operations.

The Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution states clearly that everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being and that the environment is protected through measures that prevent pollution, promote conservation and secure ecological sustainable development, whilst promoting economic and social development.

The following matters were observed in Limpopo that contravenes the Bill of Rights:

Industrial waste and open raw sewerage from the Anglo Mining compound flow freely into the catchment area of the Moetse - one of the large rivers in the area. The river provides drinking water to both people and livestock.

Mining ventilation shafts, near where people live, constantly emit foul gasses into the air. A significant increase in health problems, including coughing and breathing problems among community in the area of Driekop under Tshwakomohlala municipality, are directly being attributed to the large tailings dams in the area and general mining operations.

Mining explosives are poorly guarded. Our delegation easily entered the perimeter of an explosives magazine without being challenged. Noting that many ATM robberies in our country involve explosives of the kind only accessible to the mining industry, this lack of security is deeply disturbing. The mining house responsible is the Impala Marula mine in Tswakomohlala district.

Blasting from the mines causes cracks in houses. A number of people told us that they are also being forcibly removed from their homes to make way for mining activities in the area.

Mining also leaves the land barren and unsuitable for farming.

On land vacated by the mines, dangerous hazards such as open holes in the ground and waste materials are still present. It is sad to note that it is usually children who fall victim to these toxic substances and who suffer injuries from falling into old shafts and wells.

This was witnessed at Ga-Ratau under Maandagshoek municipality.

While mining operations continue to produce huge profits, there appears to be a lack of development in the rural villages - there is little proper infrastructure such as roads and clean water for human consumption. There is also no health centre in the area. Surely before mining takes place not only should an environmental impact assessment be done,

but a social, economic and water assessment too. This applies to all the villages we visited

We were horrified at the presence of security forces in the vicinity of the mines. These security forces are reportedly from countries in Central Africa. The nature of their presence has created a climate of fear and intimidation amongst members of the community with no assistance being provided by the South African Police Services (SAPS). There are also allegations of collaboration between SAPS officials and the mining houses. We ask that you intervene here as one of your ministers, Naledi Pandor's close relative is known to be involved in using mercenary forces to quell communities' desire to be heard. This was further witnessed at Ga-Ratau under Maandagshoek municipality

As institutions of the Church, we condemn in the strongest terms the pursuit of material profit at the expense of the well-being of the people of our country, especially when it affects the poorest of the poor. We have a God-given duty to condemn injustice and cannot remain silent in the face of abuse, particularly the abuse of the environment and local communities.

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