

Forced Relocation of Community through Violence, Intimidation, and Exclusion at AngloGold Ashanti's Mine in Kintinian, Guinea

Cape Town, February 4, 2017 – South African gold-mining giant AngloGold Ashanti acquired land to extend its open pit gold mine in Guinea through violence, intimidation, and other unethical behavior, according to a report that will be re-released at the Alternative Mining Indaba, on Wednesday at 11.30 am on the 8 February 2017, at the Double Tree Hotel, (Hamlet Room) 31 Brickfield Road, Woodstock, Cape Town, 7935, South Africa

The event is being co-hosted by the Bench Marks Foundation and Legal Resources Centre working with Guinean civil society organizations, as well as Advocates for Community Alternatives in Ghana and Communities First in Washington DC.

The South African allies recognise these experiences highlighted in the report of communities in Guinea with the South African headquartered corporation (Anglo Gold Ashanti) as their own. Bishop Jo Seoka said:

“International solidarity and people to people contact with fellow Africans experiencing dislocation and corporate abuse is necessary to counter the power of Transnational Corporations. It is the key to overcoming the culture of impunity we experience on a daily basis. We have learnt this hard lesson from our struggles with a number of corporations over the years: it is in part made possible by government’s failures to enforce measures aimed at protecting mining communities and the environment. And we must come to an end!”

The report examines a multi-year effort by AngloGold and its Guinean subsidiary, SAG, to evict approximately one thousand residents of “Area One” – a part of the village of Kintinian II in the northeastern corner of the country – to make way for a new open-pit mine. Through interviews with nearly one hundred affected villagers, government officials, and company representatives, the authors show that the community was excluded from consultation over the fate of the land, brutally repressed when they organized protests, and coerced into signing relocation agreements that they did not understand and that do not meet international standards.

In March 2015, SAG announced to the Guinean government that it would need to end its existing operations around Kintinian unless it was able to gain access to Area One by May 2016. In the wake of SAG’s threat – which was only too credible in a country from which at least two major mining companies have withdrawn their investments in the last few years – the company and the government were willing to go to great lengths to secure access to the land. “The mining sector in Guinea has been plagued by land grabs, labor violations, broken promises, and even massacres, and AngloGold has perpetuated this pattern at Kintinian,” said Aboubacar Diallo, Program Director for CECIDE, one of the Guinean organizations that authored the report.

The report documents a wide range of abuses against Area One residents, including:

- *Physical violence.* When negotiations between Kintinian residents and SAG over the terms of relocation broke down, the Guinean government sent security forces, including the “Red Berets,” a group of special forces with well documented links to gross human rights abuses, to force locals to relinquish their land.

These heavily armed personnel brutally repressed peaceful protests, treating the local population as if they were military targets – “as if we were rebels,” in the words of one resident. “They stormed the village to force us to sign the documents and cede our houses,” explained another. Many were injured, including a young girl who was hit by a bullet in her chest and neck, and whose parents just managed to save her life.

The security forces also damaged and stole property in the course of armed attacks on civilians. “The military started to beat us, they stole our telephones, they smashed doors to perpetrate thefts” said one witness. “They broke into my young brother’s shop. They took his money and his merchandise after beating up his shopkeeper,” recalled another.

- *Intimidation to achieve relocation goals.* Immediately after the suppression of the protest, armed soldiers accompanied SAG’s agents to survey residents’ household assets and pressured them to sign the inventories. “They surrounded the village and they sought out the inhabitants one by one to go to be inventoried by force,” recalled one resident. Residents describe having been “encircled” during the inventory by the military at a distance of “zero meters with hateful faces.” “The soldiers carried weapons and they threatened us to sign,” said one. “The soldiers were present and everyone was afraid.”
- *Lack of transparency.* AngloGold Ashanti ascribes to international norms on involuntary displacement, which require consultation with the affected population on relocation plans, and that all information should be shared in a language that they can understand. However, the consultant SAG hired to develop its resettlement plan did not consult with residents of Kintinian II. Moreover, villagers were pressured to sign documents in French – which very few can understand – without the opportunity to learn about their rights and options. The agreements they signed may be null and void under Guinean law.
- *Exclusion of the vulnerable, including women and children.* SAG agents’ meetings with Area One residents were almost entirely with adult men; women and children were largely excluded. Many women testified that they knew nothing of the inventory or relocation process, which was instead managed by their son or husband. As a result, many wives, mothers, and children lost their land, completely without warning.

“We called on SAG last summer to suspend the evictions, but they went ahead with their illegal actions,” said Frédéric Foromo Loua, President of MDT, one of the report’s authors. Residents were forced to leave their homes in May of last year; since then they have been left to their own devices to find temporary accommodations. Most of the affected people continue to hold out for the company to revisit the practices that have caused them harm, while only a few have just recently accepted the keys to the resettlement homes that the company has built for them.

The authors conclude that the actions of AngloGold Ashanti, SAG, and the Guinean security forces violate Guinean law and international standards for involuntary relocation. They therefore:

- Call on the Guinean government to repair the damage caused by its defense and security forces and ensure respect for human rights;
- Demand that SAG and its parent company AngloGold Ashanti carry out a public audit to assess and remedy the involuntary resettlement procedure for Area One; and
- Counsel the Kintinian community to act peacefully in defense of its interests and avoid social division.

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Centre de Commerce International pour le Développement (CECIDE) – CECIDE promotes and defends the social, economic and cultural rights of Guinean communities, and their involvement in the design and implementation of public policies for development.

Les Mêmes Droits pour Tous (MDT) – MDT focuses on the defense and promotion of human rights; it was founded by Guinean lawyers and young professionals in the legal industry to fight human rights violations in Guinea.

MDT and CECIDE have been accompanying the residents of Kintinian since 2010 on issues such as the promotion and defense of rights and obligations, prevention and conflict management, and capacity building for legal experts and local government.

Communities First – A small business working in the area of international development consulting, Communities First LLC provides technical program and advisory services to civil society and government actors on human rights-based development in the context of extractive industries, corporate accountability and natural resource governance.

Communities First is supporting CECIDE and MDT in their work on behalf of the displaced population of Kintinian, as well as other communities in Guinea.

Advocates for Community Alternatives (ACA) – ACA helps West African communities that are threatened by the destructive impacts of extractives-led development to take control of their own futures. ACA works directly with communities to design their own sustainable development plans and advocate to achieve those plans, and it builds and supports networks of lawyers and other professionals that will serve communities in need.

ACA is providing strategic legal support to CECIDE and MDT as part of their participation in the Public Interest Lawyering Network for West Africa (PILIWA), which ACA coordinates.