

Civil society writes to President and Minister on Coronavirus impact on mining-affected communities and workers



Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, Gwede Mantashe

15TH APRIL 2020

As the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa has acknowledged in his public addresses that the coronavirus pandemic is a "grave public health emergency" (23 March 2020) and we are "in uncharted territory" (30 March 2020). Mining-affected communities are especially vulnerable due to a number of factors such as their limited, and sometimes non-existent, access to piped water and the prevalence of underlying respiratory illnesses as a result of air pollution from mining activities.

We note the inclusion of "gold, gold refinery, coal and essential mining" in the list of essential services during lockdown in the Amendment of Regulations issued in Terms of Section 27 (2) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002. Further we note the measures pertaining to mining identified by Minister Gwede Mantashe in his remarks on 25 March and 3 April 2020.

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While we acknowledge that these measures include important responses to the crisis, clauses in the Minister's remarks such as "for exports, each case will be evaluated on its merits" go against the purpose of the lockdown which is to contain the spread of this deadly virus by restricting the movement of people except when necessary for the production, distribution and accessing of essential goods and services. This and other exceptions risk opening the floodgates for all operations that mine for export applying and reopening their mines, therefore putting the lives of workers and communities at risk for profit.

We have already seen the consequences of these exceptions with the reports that many mines are calling workers back to work including Anglo American's Sishen iron ore mine ("Anglo American at odds with EFF over 'return to work' request during lockdown" Times Live, 31 March 2020) and several mines in the Rustenburg and Sekhukhune Platinum complexes. We therefore call on the department to reconsider this and restrict permissible mining activity to that required for essential goods and services. In this regard we support the stance taken by Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) (see AMCU press release, 6 April 2020).

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We are especially concerned about the lack of clear measures to protect mining-affected communities, especially in relation to the named sectors such as coal and PGMs where significant movement of people and contact will continue. As reported by

the Minister on 3 April, there are already 3 confirmed covid-19 cases of mine workers in the sector in Gauteng, Mpumalanga and the Western Cape.

The Minister's statement that 'services being rendered to communities, such as water supply, will continue' ignores the reality that for many mining-affected communities a lack of access to services is the status quo. Access to water is a particular challenge in many mining-affected communities, for example in Sekhukhune. The Department needs to work with other departments to ensure that all households in mining-affected communities with no piped potable water are immediately considered for permanent water supply beyond this crisis, and must require mining companies to urgently avail water supply not required for their scaled-down operations.

Further, a plan needs to be put in place to ensure mining-affected communities are provided with a mass rollout of soap and sanitiser.

As the President has announced, government is rolling out screening and testing for Covid-19. The Department must liaise with the Department of Health, mines and all applicable departments to ensure that mining-affected communities, especially in areas where a significant degree of mining activity is still continuing, are prioritised. Further, companies must test and not merely screen workers as many infected people do not show symptoms. The mine health facilities should be open to community for use. We also require clarity as to what health infrastructure the Minerals Council has put in place in order to support Government efforts.

Due to limited access to transport in many mining-affected communities, accessing food and services is a challenge for elderly and ill members of communities in particular. It is essential that mining-affected communities are provided with food aid to ensure constant supply of food for the vulnerable. In this regard, community initiatives such as MACUA's co-ordinated food aid and prevention effort should be financially supported.

Support for informal traders in mining-affected communities is critical. Traders should be provided with safety equipment such as sanitiser and gloves to protect both the traders and the broader community.

We therefore request that the Department:

- * include social movements, women's organisations, local community organisation, and NGO structures of mining-affected community networks (such as MACUA, WAMUA and MECJON-SA) amongst the stakeholders that the Minister periodically consults with on the crisis;
- * narrow the range of mines allowed to those required for essential goods and services and provide lists of mines remaining open to trade unions, mining-affected community networks and community-based organisations;

* provide clarity on targeted measures to protect mining-affected communities including in relation to screening and testing, protective equipment, medical facilities, transport, access to food and other basic necessities (including the practicalities on how to access assistance).

* require companies to make available testing to all employees including returning employees in particular;

* regularly updates community networks as well as the directly affected communities on prevalence of Covid-19 on particular mines; and

* in addition to encouraging mining companies to share best practice, require mining companies to share information necessary for safety with communities and engage communities on their needs as a result of the crisis.

We await your response and look forward to engaging on urgent measures to safeguard the health of mining-affected communities.

Yours Sincerely

Signed by:

Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA)

Women Affected by Mining United in Action (WAMUA)

Mining and Environmental Justice Community Network of South Africa (MEJCON-SA)

Waterberg Environmental Justice Forum (WEJF)

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