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Enough is Enough: How Many Lives Must be Lost While the State Delays the Rescue of artisanal Miners in Stilfontein?

FOR IMMEDIATE REALEASE: 05 December 2024

The Pretoria North High Court of South Africa Gauteng Division has postponed the full hearing on the interim order granted in favour of the Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA) and the trapped miners in Stilfontein, North West. The main matter will be heard on the 12 of February 2025.

While the court has indicated that the immediate urgency of resolving this matter has passed, since the miners are currently receiving food and water, we wish to call on the South African Government to ensure that urgent steps are taken to retrieve the miners from underground without any further delay.

The letters that are sent by the trapped miners paint a horrifying picture of starvation, illness, and the unbearable weight of being confined with dead bodies. Yesterday when the community members had finished with rescue operation for the day, they left the rope overnight, and it was pulled up today around 10h30am.

It had a message: "Greetings parents, we have a person who died this morning. We are asking their parents to assist us to take him out. They suffered from hunger for a long time, even us we are starting to lose strength to tie the (deceased) up."

Since the week started the community rescue operation has been retrieving dead bodies. The delay tactics deployed by the South African Government are costing more lives as nothing tangible has been realised through the State's effort. As of today, 05 December 2024, **EIGHT** artisanal miners have been confirmed dead and those who are alive, are clinging to life.

The SAPS and government's response to this crisis has been both heartless and inconsistent with the values of a constitutional democracy in which the right to life is sacrosanct. As MACUA we say: Enough is enough. How many more lives must be lost before the state acts decisively to save lives? Every day that passes without proper intervention leads to more deaths. How many more bodies must be retrieved before the state takes this with the urgency that it deserves and which our constitution and the rule of law demands.

The community members, social movements like MACUA, and other charitable organisations are doing all they can with limited resources, but the state's inaction is worsening the situation and costing more lives. This is not just a humanitarian crisis but a damning indictment of a state that has forsaken the most vulnerable in our communities. By the states own admission there are potentially children and others who are below ground who want to come out but who do not have any other means to exit. The inaction and negligence are not in keeping with the constitutional values which seeks to protects lives, especially the vulnerable and marginalised.

We call on the government to **ACT NOW** because every second, and every minute counts.

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