

## MACUA & WAMUA - ADVICE OFFICE

Ground Floor, 62 Juta Street  
Braamfontein  
2000  
Johannesburg  
Telephone: 067 720 1594  
Website: [www.macua.org.za](http://www.macua.org.za)



### **MACUA's Response: Mantashe's Fascist Comments and the Government's Mass Murder in Stilfontein Must Not Stand**

**Date: 6 February 2025**

Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA), along with 50 Community-Based Organisations, the Stilfontein Solidarity Committee—comprised of the General Industries Workers Union of South Africa (GIWUSA), Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU), South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) in the North West, South African Jews for a Free Palestine, Save Our Sacred Lands, South African BDS Coalition, Bishop Paul Verryn, Visual Intifada, Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia (KAAX), Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Foundation for Human Rights (FHR)—and the Khuma community leaders, condemn in the strongest possible terms the South African government's deliberate starvation and murder of over 87 miners in Stilfontein. We also reject Minister Gwede Mantashe's recent fascist statements, which attempt to justify the inhumane treatment of these miners.

Mantashe's claim that humanitarian organisations should not have intervened because the miners "voluntarily" entered dangerous conditions is not only morally bankrupt, but also an open endorsement of mass murder. His statement reflects a deeply fascist mentality that says poor black workers are disposable and unworthy of basic human rights.

By refusing to provide humanitarian assistance, by blocking efforts to bring food and water, and by allowing these miners to die slow, painful deaths from starvation and dehydration, the South African government has carried out an intentional act of state-sponsored extermination.

#### **Autopsy evidence confirms deliberate starvation and neglect**

MACUA has appointed an independent pathologist to conduct autopsies on the deceased miners. The pathologist has personally completed 20 autopsies, and all show clear evidence that starvation and dehydration were the primary causes of death. The findings confirm that the miners further died from:

- Severe immune system suppression
- Tuberculosis (TB)
- Pneumonia
- Bowel infections

All deaths were directly linked to starvation and dehydration. The independent pathologist is still reviewing additional autopsies, but so far, starvation remains the consistent cause across all cases. These were not natural deaths—they were entirely preventable. The government deliberately refused to intervene, knowingly allowing these men to die in slow agony. This was not simply a case of miners entering a dangerous situation; the greatest and



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most lethal danger came from the state itself. Officials not only refused to provide food but actively sabotaged the only available source of sustenance by blocking and damaging supplies from community rescue teams. They knew Shaft 11's trapped miners had no other viable means of escape or survival—and they still chose to let them perish.

### **Government's blame-shifting: the lies about "Tiger"**

Instead of taking responsibility, the government has tried to shift blame onto a so-called syndicate enforcer named "Tiger." According to officials, Tiger was responsible for these miners' deaths—yet he somehow escaped from police custody with the help of police officers.

MACUA and the SSC rejects the idea that low-ranking officers could have engineered such a high-profile escape on their own. It is clear that powerful individuals within the state are actively protecting syndicate bosses while brutalising poor black miners.

The real criminals—syndicate bosses and corrupt officials—are shielded by the state. Meanwhile, the victims of economic injustice—poor black miners—are treated as criminals, starved to death, and murdered.

The escape of Tiger was not an accident. It was a deliberate state-orchestrated cover-up to deflect blame and protect the true masterminds of illegal mining.

### **MACUA and the SSC condemn all forms of violence**

MACUA and the SSC unequivocally condemns all acts of violence perpetrated by those in positions of power over marginalised and excluded people—whether committed by syndicate henchmen or by the South African police, who are mandated to protect life but instead engineered the massacre of over 87 miners.

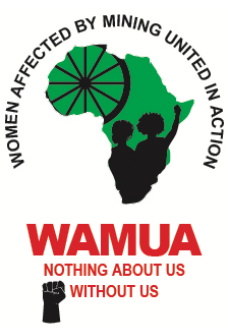
We reject the false narrative that the police were “fighting crime” in Stilfontein when in reality, they have:

- Allowed syndicates “King Pins” (some of whom have been traced to corporate companies) to operate freely.
- Assisted in the escape of "Tiger".
- Brutalised and murdered poor black miners instead of targeting the real criminals profiting from illegal mining.

This government's approach to illegal mining is not about justice. It is a war against the poor.

### **The escalating attacks on civil society organisations**

We are deeply concerned by the escalating attacks on civil society organisations that have been at the forefront of supporting the trapped miners and the Stilfontein community.



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Instead of addressing the state's own failures, government ministers have resorted to demonising and discrediting the vital work of these organisations, falsely equating their humanitarian efforts with criminality. These attempts to delegitimise civil society are nothing more than a thinly veiled assault on the constitutional right to organise, mobilise, and demand accountability.

This criminalisation of humanitarian work has now extended to direct retaliation against individuals who risked their lives to save others. One volunteer, who played a critical role in rescuing 246 men from underground while the police stood idly by, is now being targeted and humiliated by the state. Instead of honouring his bravery, the police have subjected him to daily degradation, forcing him to wash police vehicles as a form of punishment and intimidation. This is a disgraceful act of state-sanctioned harassment, designed to silence those who expose the government's inaction. We condemn these authoritarian tactics and reaffirm our unwavering support for all activists and volunteers working to protect life and uphold human dignity.

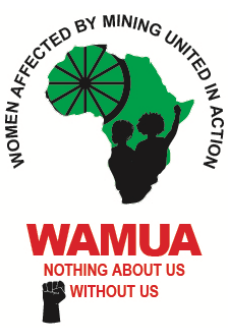
### **The urgent need for regularisation of Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) and fundamental amendments to the MPRDA**

The crisis in Stilfontein is not an isolated incident—it is a direct consequence of the South African government's failure to regulate and formalise artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). By refusing to recognise ASM as a legitimate economic activity, the state has criminalised thousands of poor black miners, pushing them into unsafe working conditions and exposing them to the exploitation of syndicates and corrupt officials.

This deliberate neglect has fuelled human rights abuses, deepened economic inequalities, and created a violent, unregulated underground economy that benefits only elites while endangering the lives of mining-affected communities.

MACUA has long called for the regularisation and formalisation of ASM as a critical step toward ensuring safe working conditions, economic justice and community-led resource governance. Instead of criminalising small-scale miners, the government must create a legal framework that allows them to mine safely, access markets and contribute to local economic development. The continued failure to do so is a betrayal of mining-affected communities and a direct violation of their constitutional rights to dignity, work and a sustainable livelihood.

This is why MACUA and the SSC demands urgent amendments to the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA). The current legislative framework serves only the interests of large corporations and politically connected elites while excluding the very communities that have borne the brunt of mining's social and environmental costs. The MPRDA must be fundamentally restructured to recognise and protect the rights of artisanal



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miners, ensure community participation in resource governance and prevent the abuse of state power to criminalise the poor while enabling corruption at the highest levels.

The tragedy in Stilfontein is yet another reminder that without urgent legislative and policy reform, the cycle of exploitation, state violence and economic exclusion will continue. MACUA and the SSC remain committed to mobilising mining-affected communities to demand justice, challenge unjust laws and push for an inclusive and democratic mining sector that serves the people—not just the political and corporate elite.

### MACUA and the SSC Demand:

- The immediate resignation of Gwede Mantashe for his role in this humanitarian catastrophe.
- Criminal charges, including murder and crimes against humanity, against Mantashe and all government officials responsible for the 87 deaths in Stilfontein.
- An independent investigation/Commission into the deliberate starvation of the miners and the government's role in enabling syndicate operations while criminalising poor miners.
- The immediate dismantling of corruption within the police force, which allows syndicate bosses to escape justice while brutalising the poor.
- The immediate start to the process of amending the MPRDA to bring the law into alignment with the stark realities of marginalised and affected communities.
- Develop urgent economic alternatives for mining-affected communities, including regulating the ASM sector, so that people are not forced into dangerous informal mining just to survive.
- An immediate end to the intimidation and harassment of civil society organisations and activists who provided humanitarian aid to the Stilfontein miners. The government must stop its attempts to criminalise those defending constitutional rights. Furthermore, we demand the immediate cessation of all degrading and retaliatory actions against volunteers, including the targeted mistreatment of the rescuer who saved 246 lives. Instead of being punished, his bravery should be recognised and honoured.

If South Africa is to remain a constitutional democracy, it cannot allow state officials to get away with mass murder. We call on all progressive movements, trade unions and civil society organisations to unite in demanding justice for the lives lost in Stilfontein.

The blood of these miners is on the hands of the government. We will not forget. We will not forgive. And we will not stop until justice is served.

Issued by the Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA) and Stilfontein Solidarity Committee (SSC).

For media inquiries, contact: Magnificent Mndebele, head of communication and media at MACUA-WAMUA Advice Office at 064 785 9746 or [Magnificent.Mndebele@macua.org.za](mailto:Magnificent.Mndebele@macua.org.za)