

Statement from the Stilfontein Solidarity Committee on the Stilfontein Mining Crisis for

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We, members of the Stilfontein Solidarity Committee (SSC), composed of various civil society organisations, stand united in our concern over the ongoing situation in Stilfontein. We are deeply troubled by the recent xenophobic remarks made by representatives of the state. Such utterances not only fuel division but also betray the principles enshrined in our Constitution and our historical commitment to unity and inclusivity.

Xenophobia:

We call upon the state to reject the allure of cheap populism for electoral gains. The government must remember its constitutional and historical obligations to fight against all forms of fascism and hate. An agenda of inclusion is fundamental to building a society that is caring and prosperous, where every individual, regardless of origin, can contribute to and benefit from our nation's growth.

The members of the SSC are eminently aware that the state has tried to characterise the artisanal mining question within simple xenophobic terms, but as the SSC, we wish to reject such narrow simplistic characterisations and wish to remind South Africans that there are thousands of families who survive off the scavenging activity of artisanal mining in a situation where communities face up to 80% unemployment and where they are denied economic opportunities that are on their door- step.

Since the advent of Colonial Mining in South Africa, when the then colonial state passed laws to force black men to enter the mines for a slave wage, the mining houses have been recruiting young black men to work on the mines from across Southern Africa and many of these Southern African communities have become as much part of the mining landscape (Labour Sending Areas) as had millions of South Africans over the past 150 years.

Many communities who have historically relied on mining to fuel their local economies are left destitute and jobless after the mines have closed. Artisanal mining has often filled the void left by the departure of these mining companies, but government has failed to understand the dire situation ghost towns like Stilfontein face, once the mines have left.

The state must take responsibility for the ways in which they have allowed mining companies to operate with impunity and for allowing these mining companies to leave open holes in the ground and have allowed mining companies to abandon workers from other countries, leaving them in South Africa without jobs and without alternatives.

The solution must be one that does not victimise the poor workers and communities who are simply trying to eat, but which holds mining companies who have grown stinking rich off our national wealth, to account.

The state should be the custodian of the weak and marginalised not of the rich and greedy mining companies who flight Trillions of rands out of our country each year.

Economic Structural Issues:

The structural economic conditions within the mining sector demand urgent attention and intervention.

The mining sector has the potential to significantly reduce unemployment and uplift communities if only the government would engage collaboratively with local communities and civil society to implement progressive and inclusive legislation. We urge the Government to work with us to fast-track amendments to the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) so that lasting solutions can be crafted which do not criminalise poor and marginalised communities. These solutions must allow those with the skills and interest to generate wealth in safe and regulated ways, so that these abandoned mines can help to stimulate local economies and uplift the entire community, as the wealth extracted will not be flighted off to Europe.

Amendments to the MPRDA:

We urge the Minister to deal urgently with the proposed amendments to the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA), which we have delivered to the Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources on the 14th of November this year. These amendments include a range of proposals to regulate the ASM sector and for ensuring greater community inclusion, and benefit from, the mining sector.

Law Enforcement and Community Safety:

The lack of consistent day-to-day policing has left a vacuum in our society across the board, allowing criminal elements, including gangs, to exploit the situation. This is not just a problem in areas where Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM) occurs but is a national issue which can be found everywhere, especially where poverty, and the retreat/ or failure of policing intersect.

The problem in mining affected communities where ASM takes place is made even worse by the fact that the sector is not regulated, and where the lack of government regulation has allowed criminal syndicates to gain the upper hand. This has led to manifestation of a state of lawlessness and has left affected communities in terrifying and traumatic ways.

The presence of law enforcement should not be reduced to mere photo opportunities like “vala umgodi” was intended to be, instead, it requires a sustained commitment to community safety and justice.

Community safety cannot be achieved without the community and the solutions to isolating and getting rid of the criminal syndicates must include not only community involvement on day-to-day policing initiatives but must also include a plan to deal with the economic exclusion and hunger faced by the community. Anything less will be papering over the cracks only for it to resurface further down the line.

We call on the state to offer holistic solutions rather than simply lashing out with violence.

Call to Action:

We call upon:

The Public and Media:

To join us in demanding the safe release of the miners trapped in Stilfontein. Your voice can make a difference in ensuring that human rights are upheld even in the face of the state failures to regulate the ASM sector and the absence of police in the day-to-day policing of our communities.

We also call on the public to join your local community organisation and to ensure that we become part of the solutions to hold the state to account for allowing this state of decay and lawlessness to take hold and to get involved in local efforts to drive criminal syndicates out.

The Government:

To accelerate the process of amending the MPRDA to reflect a more inclusive and community- focused approach to mining. This legislation must not only regulate but also empower, ensuring that mining operations contribute positively to the socio-economic fabric of our nation.

To urgently work with communities to find lasting and sustainable solutions to their economic exclusion and to collectively work to isolating criminal elements.

Considering these issues, we advocate for:

1. Immediate action to ensure the safety and rights of all individuals involved in mining activities, legal or otherwise, while working towards solutions that provide alternative livelihoods
2. A robust dialogue between the government, mining communities, and civil society organisations to develop policies that genuinely address the root causes of illegal mining, rather than merely the symptoms.
3. A comprehensive review of policing strategies to ensure they are proactive, community-oriented, and capable of addressing the security vacuum that has allowed criminal gangs to thrive.

We stand resolute in our belief that through unity, dialogue, and inclusive policymaking, we can transform the mining sector into a beacon of hope and prosperity for all South Africans.

Issued by the Stilfontein Solidary Committe and endorsed by the following organisations:

1. MACUA - Mining Affected Communities United in Action
2. SAFTU - South African Federation of Trade Unions
3. GIWUSA - General Industries Workers Union of South Africa
4. LHR - Lawyers for Human Rights
5. SAGRC - South African Green Revolutionary Council BMF -
6. Bench Marks Foundation
7. FHR - Foundation for Human Rights
8. CALS - Centre for Applied Legal Studies.
9. AASA - ActionAid South Africa
10. LMN- London Mining Network
11. CER- Centre for Environmental Rights

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