

Mines urged to put workers' dignity, safety first

Communications Minister Nomwula Mokonyane says the mining sector must transform to ensure that workers' rights, dignity, health and safety are not compromised.



Reflecting on the tragic events that happened in Marikana six years ago, the minister said government has started implementing the recommendations made by the Marikana Commission of Inquiry.

In August 2012, a total of 44 people died following days of violence during a protracted wage strike by workers at the Lonmin platinum mine in the North West.

Following the tragic events, government established the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, led by Judge Ian Gordon Farlam, to investigate the circumstances that led to this tragedy and importantly, what needed to be done to prevent a recurrence of such a tragedy.

The outcome of the inquiry made recommendations, which included compensation for the injured and their families; examining the procedures of Public Order Policing, and preparing valid cases for prosecution, according to applicable laws.

Government has paid R67m in the finalised cases of the families who lost their breadwinners six years ago in Marikana.

Mokonyane said government was awaiting the response from the legal fraternity that represented the victims' families with regards to the various offers that were made for compensation.

Government's plans to improve the lives of South Africans include rural development, economic development, building sustainable, integrated, safe and secure human settlements.

"Also of importance is sorting out issues under the Labour Relations Act on the employer/employee relationships. Strengthening the bodies and structures of engagement between the worker and employer is quite important. Transformation of the mining sector is also important.

"Beyond the commission's recommendations on what government needs to do, our own vision of the South Africa we want speaks to interventions that will make sure that events that happened in Marikana do not happen again. We regret the tragic events that happened," she said.

The minister expressed her condolences to the families, co-workers and community members of the people who died in Marikana.

On Thursday, government released a statement which detailed the progress that has been made in implementing the recommendations of the commission.

"The South African Police Service (SAPS) has also made great progress in strengthening the capacity of the public order policing. A total of 3,825 members from Public Order Policing have participated in basic training and in crowd management. SAPS will be increasing the number of the police to be trained in Public Order Policing this year," the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) said.

The Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) has also completed its investigations into the killing of three miners and two policemen. The policemen and the three miners were killed in an incident on 13 August 2012.

Six suspects were arrested and three were summonsed. One suspect was charged for both cases.

Mining communities living conditions

In 2012, an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for the Special Presidential Package for the Revitalisation of Distressed Mining Communities Project -- chaired by the Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation -- was set up.

The mandate of the IMC is to oversee the implementation of integrated and sustainable human settlements, improve living and working conditions of mine workers and to determine the development path of mining towns and the historic labour sending areas.

"The Department of Human Settlements launched a R700m housing project for Marikana. To date, 544 housing units have been completed. Substantial progress has also been made in the upgrading of informal settlements in mining communities," GCIS said.

In addition, government and mining companies in Rustenburg, Madibeng region, are engaged in private-public partnerships in sharing bulk and reticulation infrastructure in order to deliver basic services such as water and sanitation to mine communities.

The mining companies involved in this partnership include Lonmin and Samancor (Western Chrome Mines).

"Partnerships in education are equally important to improve the lives of mining communities.

“Lonmin officially handed over the New Marikana Primary School to the North West Department of Education and Sport Development and the Marikana community in March this year. The school has all the necessary educational facilities and provides a conducive environment for pupils to learn,” GCIS said.

Four one-stop centres have been established to offer integrated health and social services to both active and ex-mine workers

“Government has provided support to ensure that unclaimed pensions and provident funds are paid to ex-mineworkers. Initially, the backlog was R9bn in 2014 but has been reduced considerably to R4.5bn,” GCIS said.

Furthermore, government has announced a national minimum wage, which is supported by organised business, labour and community.

“Once implemented, the national minimum wage will immediately benefit and uplift the socio-economic status of up to 6.4m workers in our country,” GCIS said

“The suspects face charges of murder, defeating the ends of justice, attempted murder, and contravention of section 6(2) of the Commissions Act and contravention of section 29(1) of the IPID Act,” GCIS said.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>