

Corporate arrogance behind mining protests

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The violent protests that have erupted in Ga-Mapela in Limpopo Province today reflect mining in South Africa as a whole, says John Capel, Executive Director of the Bench Marks Foundation.

Capel says the corporate arrogance of mining companies effectively excludes communities from critical decisions that affect their lives.

"All communities want is to be treated with respect and dignity. Instead, they are treated like animals or irritants in the way of mining, and to add fuel to the fire, in come the police to quell any dissent. "No real attempt is made to address the underlying issues. No wonder they feel isolated and we see developments such as those today in Limpopo," he said.

Capel said that the Bench Marks Foundation had for the last 10 years encouraged proper consultation with community members. It is now advocating an independent central fund to be established on which communities that are affected by the actions of mines can draw from to appoint and pay for their own experts during consultations.

This would ensure that communities are empowered to defend their property without being pushed into actions that they do not understand.

Capel said that all mines disrespect communities and ride roughshod over community concerns. In this case, Anglo Platinum's Mogalakwena Mine is in the spotlight.

"The people suffer land contestation that directly impacts on their rural life style, air quality and water pollution. Sadly, this is all that is

on offer to communities - not development or employment.

“The common cry of communities is to have a way to lift themselves out of the destitution created by mining. Winners and losers abound while the industry acts with impunity towards community concerns.

“The continual use of police and security services to crush objections and opposition undermines community’s constitutional rights to administrative justice, to be consulted in an informed manner and to have the right to object, protest and be heard,” Capel added.

Capel also says that those communities situated in rural areas are often overlooked.

“Anglo Platinum and the police itself must not forget the Marikana massacre and the outcome. This militarist approach to dealing with protests is unacceptable.

“Anglo American must be held responsible for what happens here. The mindset that production must continue at any cost must end and the world must know about human rights abuse in the mining industry and the use of detaining opposition.”

Capel warned that if Anglo American continues on a path such as this, and if it reflects its attitude - one that we would call psychopathic tendencies - then the real culture of the company will be plain for all to see.

“It is this culture of impunity that needs addressing. But unfortunately the South African government is not interested in far-flung communities that are affected by such actions of the mines. In our experience and through our research, we have discovered that this is where empowerment of elites usually takes place, and it is regrettable that the present government is party to this.

“Until we have proper oversight and regulation of mining, this

impunity will continue. Once again, the losers will be the poor and the most desperate in society. And the unhappiness and unrest by communities will continue”.

The Bench Marks Foundation monitors multinational corporations operation in Southern Africa and the rest of the African continent to ensure that they meet minimum social, environmental and economic standards and promotes an ethical and critical voice on what constitutes corporate social responsibility.

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