



mineral resources
& energy

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Mineral Resources and Energy
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2020 MINE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY PRINCIPAL'S SUMMIT

Today, 26 November 2020 - The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) convened a virtual Principals meeting to review the state of occupational health and safety in the country's mining industry. The meeting held under the theme *"Every mine worker returning home unharmed every day, striving for Zero Harm,"* attended by Minister Gwede Mantashe, senior officials of the DMRE, captains of the Mining Industry and sector labour organisations.

The tripartite of principals expressed their regret that due to the Covid-19 restrictions, they were unable to convene the normal biannual health and safety summit.

The DMRE welcomes the support and commitment of the sector Principals towards achieving all the mine health and safety milestones, particularly with regards ensuring that every mineworker returns home from work unharmed every day.

The Principals expressed concern over the increased number of fatalities in the industry during the current year, compared to 2019. To date there have been 52 fatalities, one more than in the previous year's record of fatalities. "Though we didn't have a disaster this year, more worrying to us is the significant number of multiple fatalities in 38 fatal accidents compared to 42 last year," said Minister Mantashe.

The Principals cautioned against complacency and called for greater cooperation among all stakeholders. "There is a trend to rush to increase production, with people

dying in the process. We must prioritise the health and safety of persons at the mines at all times,” said Minister Gwede Mantashe.

“We must not see each other as enemies. We must appreciate that the value of working together is bigger than being at each other’s throats as a sector. When we work together, the industry will be better. We must make mines to produce safer and continue mining,” said the Minister.

The tripartite of Principals welcomed the steady recovery of mining from the impact of Covid-19, and the recognition of the sector as a green shoot of the economy as pronounced by the National Treasury. “The mining sector is recovering. We are 2.8% below the level we were performing at before the pandemic. We are happy with the V-shaped recovery,” said Minister Mantashe.

The Minister called for investment in new technologies that will improve the health and safety records. “We must not be allergic to new technologies. We must equip our workers to adjust to new technologies so that they can be custodians of the new jobs created by new technologies,” added Minister Mantashe.

Minister Mantashe called for special attention to the safety of women at mines and in society. He said, “We must ensure that women work safely. The safety equipment design and actual allocation of tasks to women is very important. Women are not tools for sexual harassment and abuse. They must be given space to work without fear. There is scientific evidence that women are more productive.”

The Principals cautioned against the targeting of vulnerable workers for retrenchment. Addressing the issue, Minister Mantashe said, “Vulnerable workers must not be targeted for retrenchment. They put their lives on the block to convert the investment by shareholders into wealth. They must be recognised for their sacrifices. When they suffer from diseases as a result of their work, they must not be sent home to die. They must be looked after up to the end for their wellbeing. We must welcome the idea of creating areas for people living with disabilities as a respect to workers.”

The Minister reiterated the Department's commitment to formalising small scale and artisanal miners – a necessary intervention to allow people to continue being productive and contribute to economic growth.

Furthermore, the Minister Mantashe called for improved investment into exploration, referring to it as the “life blood of mining.”

In closing, the tripartite welcomed the level of engagement, and noted that Summits are not resolution making platforms but, rather provide the opportunity for engagement on proposals for the consideration of the collective.

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