



**MINERAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE  
MINISTER OF MINERAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY  
MR GWEDE MANTASHE (MP)**

**MINESAFE CONFERENCE  
VIRTUAL, 28 NOVEMBER 2023**

Programme Director,

President of the Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (SAIMM), **William Joughin**

Leadership of organised business

Leadership of organised labour

Esteemed delegates

The health and safety of all persons at mines, in particular the mineworkers, is important not only because they **convert investments into wealth**, but because the **life of a human being is more precious and valuable** than the mineral resources sought-after.

The recent sporadic incidents of **underground sit-ins** are of great concern to us, as doing so puts mineworkers at risks of seismic events, flammable gas explosions and fires with a potential to cause disaster or significant loss of lives.

I am not sure if any of you remember the 1960 Coalbrook disaster which killed 437 mineworkers when pillars caved in, and the Kinross disaster which killed 177 mineworkers at a go due to methane inhalation.

**Our mining industry cannot afford a repeat of these disasters.** Let us work together to end these underground sit-ins.

For its part, the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) has, through the Mine Health and Safety Council (MHSC), ***drafted regulations to prohibit underground sit-ins.*** The regulations have been shared with all stakeholders to enhance them with their contributions before they could be put in place for implementation. We hope that you will do so before the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2023.

Let me hasten to say, ***these efforts do not mean workers are prohibited from embarking on industrial action*** but are encouraged to exercise their rights in a safe environment without putting their lives at a greater risk of not only getting infected by diseases but losing their lives instantly.

With that said, allow me to express our gratitude to the Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (SAIMM) for the invitation and the opportunity to engage with the delegates at this important conference.

We are particularly pleased that gathered here are delegates whose sole purpose is to ***improve the health and safety of mineworkers*** and contribute to ***achieving zero harm*** in the South African mining industry.

We hope that when you rise from this conference, you will come up with concrete proposals to foster **collaboration and collective efforts** among all social partners – government, business, and labour.

The **latest statistics and reports** on health and safety in our industry are a concern.

Given the historical record of 49 fatalities recorded in 2022, the continued loss of lives and injuries in the industry are regrettable. To date, the **provisional number of reported fatalities and injuries** for the year 2023 stands at **41 and 1 775** respectively.

The pain and sufferings experienced by families of deceased mineworkers, who have lost their loved ones due to fatal mine accidents and diseases, must be avoided at all costs. **One life lost in the industry, is one too many** and this must be stopped immediately. This mine safe conference must help us find lasting solutions to these challenges.

It is also regrettable that **mineworkers are still exposed to occupational hazards and diseases**. The fact that in the past seven months, the industry reported a total of **926 cases of occupational diseases as compared to 938 cases** in the same period last year, should be of great concern to all of us. This calls

on all of us to ensure that all mines have appropriate measures and expertise to enhance the health and safety of mineworkers.

The DMRE will continue to **enforce and strengthen its regulatory instruments** to improve the health and safety of mineworkers, including environmental conditions in which mining operations take place. The **Mine Health and Safety Amendment Bill** which seeks to strengthen enforcement provisions and reinforce offences and penalties is currently undergoing extensive consultations. We hope that the consultations will be concluded soon to pave the way for the bill to be tabled in parliament for its approval.

In order to protect mineworkers from transport related injuries and fatalities, the DMRE **gazetted the trackless mobile machinery regulations** in December 2022 for the sector to implement the personal detection system. The significant **reduction in the transport related fatalities** is an indication that adherence to these regulations is beginning to bring in the desired results.

Given the **fatal bus accident** which killed twenty people, most of which were mineworkers at the Venetia Mine in September 2023, government is collaborating with social partners to ensure that **minimum standards are developed** for the mining sector

to mitigate these road accidents. In the absence thereof, we continue to encourage all road users to **exercise caution and be vigilant** to prevent similar fatalities in future.

During the remaining period of 2023, the DMRE will **intensify the monitoring of health and safety at mines** through **focused inspections and audits**. Mining companies who fail to adhere to the Mine Health and Safety Act (MHSA) and the various regulations put in place to prevent harm to mineworkers will be stopped from operating.

Let me also take this opportunity to urge **mineworkers not to risk their lives for production bonuses**. It is important to always remember that **every mineworker has a right to refuse and withdraw** from a **workplace that he or she considers dangerous**.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate that as the DMRE, we remain **steadfast in our pursuit of attaining zero harm** in the sector and call on all social partners to prioritise the health and safety of our mineworkers. I wish you a successful conference.

***I thank you.***