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CIVIL SOCIETY IN MANICALAND STATEMENT ON CONTINUED DEATH OF MINERS AT REDWING MINE

We the undersigned are representatives of community based organizations and civil society organisations raising community voice on environmental, social and economic rights of Penhalonga and surrounding communities.

We bemoan government's lack of commitment to investigate deaths of people in mining incidences at Redwing Mine in Penhalonga and effect accountability measures that will secure lives. The rise in cases of artisanal gold mine workers losing their lives in dangerous mining shafts created by Better brands Mining Company is alarming. We gathered that in December 2020 Better brands was awarded a non standard tributary agreement by government through the Mining Affairs Board to undertake surface and underground mining activities at Redwing Mine. Since 2020 we have observed that better brands has engaged artisanal miners in subsistence surface mining operations at Redwing Mine in what appears to be lack of capacity by the company to invest in modern large scale gold mining. We have noticed that these artisanal mine workers are poorly resourced. They are dying from shaft and roof collapsing as a result of weak and unsupported ground. Some are also dying from falling into unprotected pits ranging from 30 to 50 metres deep. Only half way through the month of January 2023, 4 have died. 2 from ground collapse and 2 from flooding in a shaft. A minimal of 47 artisanal mine workers (25 in 2021 and 22 in 2022) were confirmed by relevant officials to have lost their lives in mining shafts. 6 of the 22 artisanal mine workers were killed in November 2022. Sources working in the mining pits indicated that over 100 people have lost their lives in the pits since 2020 but some are not officially recorded. Others highlighted that fatal incidences were occurring almost every week in the mining pits. Mining sources interviewed also confirmed the high rate of fatal incidences taking place at Redwing Mine and underlined the lack of transparency and accountability in documentation of fatal incidences at Redwing. Mining operations at Redwing Mine are in complete violation of statutory instrument 109 of 1990 (Management and Safety) Regulations, 190. There is no barricading to working sites and steep inclined shafts, no protection to blasting fumes, dust and gases, no protective clothing including lifeline and life jackets, no precautionary measures in working distances of less than 10 metres, no adequate timbering to prevent fall of ground among other issues.

We also bemoan the lack of government commitment to hold Better brands accountable to ongoing massive leakages of gold ore and severe degradation of the environment in Penhalonga. In 2021 we submitted a report to the Provincial Mining Office and other regulatory authorities raising concern on the establishment of 129 illegal hammer mills and cyanidation sites along river streams, residential areas, steep slopes and farming community that were dumping hazardous substances such as mercury and cyanide on the environment. The report saw a task force comprising among others, Mutasa Rural District Council (MRDC) EMA, Ministry of Mines and Zimbabwe Republic Police embarking on an operation to clamp down illegal mining activities in Penhalonga. The operation led to the suspension of surface mining activities at Redwing Mine by the Joint Operation Command (JOC). Porous surface mining activities at Redwing are feeding gold ore to illegal mining sites that have mushroomed around Redwing mine. A month later we were perplexed by the resumption of hazardous surface mining operations at Redwing Mine. The decision to allow Betterbrands to resume operations without accounting for concerns raised

in various engagement meetings involving JOC, local authorities, local farmers, and Redwing mine workers, CBOs, CSOs and residents of Penhalonga was retrogressive. We are saddened that the number of hammer mills and cyanidation sites dumping toxic substances into the environment have risen to 532. We are also saddened that farmers are losing livestock from consuming water poisoned by chemical seepages from substandard cyanidation sites dotted around farming areas such as Fairview farm. The majority of these mining sites are operating illegally and those with documents are non compliant with their EIAs. It is alarming to note that all these sites are not mining gold at their claims. They are receiving and processing stolen gold ore from Redwing Mine day and night. Workers and residents of Penhalonga alike, have accused Betterbrands management in the presence of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Defence, Home Affairs and Security for operating several illegal hammer mills outside Redwing as one of the major reason for laxity of security at Redwing Mine. An expert calculation of an average of 2000 bags of ore that are being smuggled from Redwing to outside hammer mills and cyanidation sites daily, estimated that a total of 7kgs of gold was being lost every day to the black market. We have observed a growing network of local and foreign gold buyers spreading their operations in different suburbs of Mutare. Gold from these networks is being smuggled to international destinations through Mozambique.

In a nutshell

- Mining and processing of gold at Redwing and the surrounding sites that have mushroomed in Penhalonga continue to violate section 73 of the constitution on right of citizens to environmental protection and sustainable utilization of natural resources, mining safety regulations, control of alluvial mining regulations, control of hazardous substances regulations, waste disposal effluent and solid waste disposal, Water Act CAP 20, atmospheric pollution control, Forestry Act, Gold trade act and EMA Act among others.
- These porous mining activities are in violation of the objective of vision 2030 on mining which put emphasis on sustainable mining by stakeholders through a well governed mining sector which is ethically inclusive, environmentally friendly, socially responsible and appreciated by surrounding communities.
- These mining operations are also contrary to the attainment of National Development Strategy (NDS1) which put priority on environmental and climate change protection, sustainable natural resource utilisation, public service delivery, devolution, good governance and inclusive economic growth.

In view of these worrying developments we have continued to engage local authorities to express our concerns on several dialogue platforms. We have provided evidence of violations and accompanied regulatory authorities to areas adversely impacted by these hazardous mining activities. We have engaged relevant Parliamentary Portfolio Committees such as Portfolio Committee of Mines and Mining Development and Portfolio Committee on Defence Home Affairs and Security Services. These committees have visited the mining community where they have interacted with all relevant stakeholders and discovered the unsustainability of the mining operations. From these engagements we have come to realise that;

- Mining operations at Redwing were approved through an exclusionary and unsustainable nonstandard tributary agreement by the mining affairs board in consultation with the Minister of Mines to operate for 7 years starting from December 2020.
- The capacity of current mining entity to kick start underground mining and end hazardous surface artisanal mining at Redwing Mine is not attainable as proven at Parliamentary Portfolio Committee of Mines and Mining Development and Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Defence, Home Affairs and Security Services fact finding meetings at Redwing Mine in 2022.
- Government Mining Engineer has visited Redwing Mine twice in 2022 but we have not seen drastic actions being taken by government to address the challenges at Redwing Mine in line with the provisions of the mining management safety regulations.
- The Attorney General has an obligation to act on reports of fatal incidences occurring at Redwing Mine and ensure Betterbrands is held to account.

- An order to suspend surface mining operations because of high incidences of deaths in mining pits at Redwing Mine was delivered by EMA to mining authorities on 10 January 2023. The order makes it clear that mining operations have continued to violate provisions of section 37(4) of the EMA ACT and that mining shafts at Redwing are not up to expected standards of the Ministry of Mines.

Against this background we therefore:

- Demand government to adhere to the principals of good governance such as the rule of law by enforcing the suspension of surface hazardous mining activities and recommend due diligence and best mining practices that are constitutional and sustainable.
- Edge government to balance business and human rights by ensuring that the US\$12 billion mining industry by 2023 is backed by a watertight governance framework that uphold human rights and development.
- Recommend government to expedite legislation affecting local government such as devolution bills and the Mines and Minerals Amendment Bill to ensure that local authorities have autonomy over the governance of resources found in their provinces.
- Remind Portfolio committee on Mines and Mining Development and the Portfolio Committee on Defense, Home Affairs and Security Services to summon mining authorities at Redwing, the Minister of Mines and Mining Development and Minister of Environment and account for adverse impacts of mining at Redwing Mine that have claimed over 100 people.

Organisations:

Centre For Research And Development

Penhalonga Youth Development Trust

Zivai Community Empowerment Trust

Penhalonga Service Delivery Committee

Penhalonga Residents And Ratepayers Trust