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PRESS STATEMENT



Penhalonga Youth
Development Trust

Government must account for unfolding mining disaster at Redwing Mine

CRD and Penhalonga Youth Development Trust (PYDT) hold the government accountable for the unfolding mining disaster at Redwing Mine. At least 15 artisanal miners are feared dead after the collapse of Tsapauta Adit at Redwing Mine yesterday. Information gathered by CRD indicate that previous mining operations by Betterbrands had depleted surface and shaft pillars. Further gold digging in old shafts coupled with uncontrolled blasting forced the ground to curve in. Local mining experts interviewed indicate that mining collapse could have occurred between level 4 and 5 which is about 140 to 180 metres. At Redwing Mine, a week hardly passes without lives being lost in unsecured mining pits. In 2020 Government awarded Betterbrands a nonstandard tributary agreement to undertake surface mining operations at Redwing Mine. During that time, CRD rallied civil society partners, Penhalonga community, mining experts and Redwing mine workers to question the sustainability of conducting surface mining on top of underground tunnels and stopes at Redwing Mine. CRD and partners warned government during the EIA consultation process with Betterbrands that surface mining pits were going to tear away pillars stabilising the ground leading to ground subsidence, destruction and disappearing of infrastructure and loss of lives.

<https://www.crdzim.org.zw/Community%20raises%20concern%20on%20hazardous%20mining.pdf>

The warning came at a time when the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) had stopped another mining company Prime Royal Africa from continuing with the same mining operations which had extensively damaged the environment amid glaring evidence of mineral plunder, tax evasion and violence. Barely a year after resumption of subsistence mining operations by Better brands, Penhalonga witnessed grant theft of gold ore at Redwing mine that was smuggled and processed at illegal hammer mills and cyanidation sites that had mushroomed round Penhalonga. CRD collaborated with Penhalonga Youth Development Trust to document evidence of these illegal mining developments and submitted findings to government. Government initially heeded the call and clamped down on these illegal activities before suspending Better brands mining operations in December 2021. Porous Better brands mining activities were soon to resume unabated amid rising increase in fatal mining incidences. Alarmed by the increase in number of death at Redwing Mine, CRD and Penhalonga Youth Development Trust (PYDT) approached EMA in January 2023 seeking government intervention to hold Better brands accountable for loss of precious lives at Redwing Mine. CRD also rallied civil society partners to produce a joint statement demanding urgent government action on adverse Betterbrands mining operations.

<https://crdzim.org.zw/Civil%20Society%20in%20Manicaland%20Statement%20on%20Continued%20death%20of%20Mine%20workers%20At%20Redwing%20Mine.pdf>

EMA effected a ban on Betterbrands mining activities pointing out that their operations were in violation of section 37(4) of the EMA ACT and that their mining shafts were in violation of statutory instrument 109 of 1990 (Management and Safety) Regulations, 190. The nation had expected government enquiry into the sustainability of Betterbrands mining model at Redwing during this period. Government was also expected to hold the miner accountable for the death at Redwing mine. Prior to the ban, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee of Mines and Mining Development and Parliamentary Portfolio Committee of Defense, Home Affairs and Security Services had shown disapproval of Betterbrands mining activities at Redwing. After consulting widely with different stakeholders they also recommended a government review of mining model to address leakages and human rights violations ongoing at the mine.

https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Committee%20on%20Defence-%20Report%20on%20security%20of%20minerals%20in%20Zimbabwe.pdf

Against all the dangers, government gave a green light again for Betterbrands to resume mining operations at Redwing in March 2023. A recent environmental survey conducted by CRD and PYDT indicate a surge in the establishment of illegal hammer mills and cyanidation tanks from 129 hammer mills and 6 cyanidation tanks in October 2021 to 774 illegal hammer mills and 28 cyanidation tanks by 31 December 2023. These gold processing plants have been established along farms, streams, residential areas, schools and Timber estates in Penhalonga and surrounding communities exposing citizens to worst forms of chemical contamination, noise pollution and hazardous waste dumping that have rendered water from affected rivers unusable. These gold processing plants are illegally accessing gold ore for processing from porous Better brands surface mining activities. These processing plants cannot account to the government for the gold that they are processing because they are not registered. Today over 15 lives have been probably lost in Tsapauta section of Redwing Mine concession that Better brands apportioned to Redwing Mine workers after mining the area for 3 years. Betterbrands has continued to extract gold from shaft and surface pillars in Rezende 1,2 and 3 and Zaina sections of Redwing Mine concession. It will not be long before a similar disaster unfold in those areas. Without political will to stop this dangerous mining activity more lives will be lost at Redwing Mine. It is possible that over 150 lives have been lost since these mining activities started in 2021. Government has a constitutional obligation to protect the rights of citizens to life and environmental well being. CRD is reliably informed that Government Mining Engineer has regularly inspected mining operations at Redwing Mine. However drastic measures have not 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 incidents occurring at Redwing Mine and ensure Betterbrands is held accountable. Under government watch, Better brands' ruinous mining activities are continuing at Redwing Mine.

Address: 1 St Helens Drive Mutare Zimbabwe **Telephone:** +263 20 65411 **Email:** crdzim@gmail.com

Website: www.crdzim.org.zw **Follow us on Twitter:** crd Zimbabwe