



MEDIA RELEASE

AMCU DISAPPOINTED BY LACKING COVID-19 REGULATIONS FOR MINING AND ENERGY

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The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) is highly disappointed in the amended regulations pertaining to the exemption from the lockdown regulations of minerals and energy as announced this afternoon. The Union says that the conditions for the health and safety measures to be put in place are inadequate, and reiterates its call for a national task team to determine minimum standards for the sector as a whole.

This afternoon the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), Honourable Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma hosted a press conference to announce amendments to the regulations issued in terms of the Disaster Management Act. These amendments included amendments to the scope and effect of the mining and energy sector being exempted from the national lockdown regulations. These amendments were further clarified by the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, Honourable Gwede Mantashe.

“As AMCU, we are very disappointed in the DMRE [Department of Mineral Resources and Energy] for not using this opportunity to include minimum health and safety standards in the amendments to the Covid-19 regulations, in terms of the Disaster Management Act. Once again, we see that the issue of profits is more important than the health and safety of workers”, said AMCU President Joseph Mathunjwa.

Part of the amendments are the deletion of the word “essential” from the term “essential mining”, which now renders all mining activities as exempted from the national lockdown. This means that, where the previous definition mentioned coal, gold, gold refinery and essential mining, it now allows for all commodities to be mined.

“It is clear to us that the DMRE again bowed to the pressure of the mining bosses to give a blanket permission to start mining”, said Mathunjwa. “We can understand that food, health, security and even IT [information technology] can be seen as essential services, but how can mining be regarded as an essential service?”, Mathunjwa asked.

The amendments also allow for mines to ramp up their production to 50% during the lockdown, and then more thereafter, while setting certain conditions for health and safety measures for workers when returning to the mines from their homes.

“We don’t have problem with returning back to work, but the guidelines on what the mines must do are totally inadequate”, said Mathunjwa. “Many questions beg answers, such as: What will be done to ensure social distancing in the cages? What type of masks will be issued and how often? Who will inspect the quarantine facilities at mines? These so-called conditions in the amendments are far too vague to be binding and enforceable on the mines, and we predict serious problems during the ramp-up of operations”, he added.

On 8 April 2020, AMCU called on the DMRE to establish a task team consisting of all stakeholders and health experts to arrive at a national Code of Practice (COP) for dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. AMCU proposed that this COP should be gazetted as national regulations, which will be binding on all companies in the sector. AMCU included several aspects that need to be covered in such regulations.

“We still call for the establishment of a national task team to set minimum health and safety standards which is binding on all mining operations and can be enforced”, said Mathunjwa. “We will spare no resource to ensure that our members are guaranteed to be safe and healthy before they return to work”, Mathunjwa concluded.

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495 words excluding summary and headings

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