

# MINERS OF THE WORLD UNITE AGAINST POOR HEALTH AND SAFETY CONDITIONS

Miners International Federation (MIF) convened an international conference on mine health and safety in Hatern Germany early this year. Delegates from 71 countries, representing 77 organisations, including NUM attended. The main objective of the three day conference was to draft a health and safety charter that will serve as policy guidelines for national and international purposes.

Flowing from the conference was the adoption of "GLOBAL ACTION PROGRAMME FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE MINING INDUSTRY". The programme's objective is to improve the conditions pertaining to health and safety of mineworkers and their families, with the ultimate objective of realising the highest attainable standards of health defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. Conference made a commitment to ensure that acceptable norms and standards on health and safety in mining are enforceable through instruments to be adopted by the INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION (ILO).

Employers and governments would carry the responsibility for a series of legally binding obligations.

MIF listed some of the provisional standards and rights that should be incorporated in the health and safety charter.

## On the prevention and reduction of work-related health hazards

★ Employers are responsible for the prevention and reduction of health hazards including physical and mental stress.

★ An International instrument to be adopted by the ILO should lay down the minimum age for employment in mines for both underground and surface mining with a total prohibition of child labour. The maximum number of working hours per day should be specified, including break time and travel time to and from the shaft and tunnel entrance. The maximum working hours per week, and the minimum amount of paid leave should also be specified.

★ Working conditions shall be adopted to people's differing physical and mental aptitudes. Workers should be given the right to participate in the design of their own working situation and in the processes of change and development affecting their own work.

★ Personal accordant prevention equipment (such as protective goggles etc.) or, in case of danger from harmful or poisonous gases, filters or oxygen must be provided to the mine workers at the expense of the employer. Surface baths, wash rooms, and toilets and areas for the storage and drying of clothing, as well as underground toilet facilities must be available in mines.

★ Companies must have policies and facilities to cover emergencies. Accidents need to be carefully investigated in order to take preventive measures to avoid similar accidents in the future. Representatives of the miners have the right to participate in investigations to determine the causes of mine accidents. Companies must keep statistics in accordance with ILO regulations on the type and degree of seriousness of accident, the duration of work-related disabilities, and specific occurrence of hazards such as fires or falls of ground, even if these do not result in injuries. These statistics must be regularly submitted to offices designated by the state. A duplicate must be delivered to the mine workers health and safety representatives and the union concerned.

★ Health and safety committees should participate in decision-making and control of all issues that have a possible impact on health and safety, including planning and budget allocation.

★ Vocational training should be given on an on-going basis at the expense of the employer. Mineworkers must be instructed and receive regular refresher courses on first aid in case of accidents. Appropriate first aid instruction in line with specific international standards, must be available in mines. It must be possible at all times to reach a doctor for emergency assistance. Provision must be made to ensure that it is possible to reach hospital within reasonable amount of time for the care of seriously injured persons.

## On realisation of decent living conditions and a healthy environment

Companies must have a policy to prevent adverse environmental effects and must apply the best available techniques to control environmental hazards.

On the promotion of the interests of disabled workers and their relatives Governments and companies have a joint responsibility to take adequate measures for physical and mental rehabilitation of disabled workers. Disabled workers who can resume their job must be provided with the opportunity and the means-including training alternative meaningful and equally remunerated employment. Adequate compensation must be awarded to disabled workers and relatives of the deceased. For this purpose, a social security scheme specifically designed for the mining industry and based on self-determination could be aimed at. When such specific schemes are in existence, their continuity must be preserved.

MIF pledged its support for international solidarity on health and safety issues. Two campaigns were launched for immediate action:-

★ The right to know campaign which would spell out what this right means in practice, indicate where this right has been won and is implemented and expose those companies and governments which deny mineworkers this right.

★ The international health and safety day which would draw attention to the rights of mineworkers with respect to occupational health and safety but also identify those transnational corporations and governments which exploit children, subject miners to hazardous working conditions, intolerable living conditions and pollute or allow pollution of the environment.



Brutality in the mines.

## NUM IN HEALTH AND SAFETY BREAKTHROUGH

NUM has made a major breakthrough on health and safety matters by reaching agreement with the Chamber of Mines on the need to establish the commission of Mine Safety.

The union has been calling for the establishment of such a commission since 1983, after the Hlobane mine disaster in which 65 workers were killed.

After nearly ten years of campaigning by NUM the mine bosses ultimately agreed in principle as the rate of deaths and casualties in mine accidents continue to rocket.

Negotiations are under way between the NUM and Chamber on terms of reference of the commission. NUM has proposed that the commission to be presided over by a judge be established to:-

- Investigate all aspects of the legal regulation of occupational health and safety in the mining industry in South Africa (including compensation for injury, illness and death).
- Make recommendations to the State President on improvements to the existing legislation and the

implementation thereof in the light of circumstances prevailing in the industry and international standards.

- On the other hand the Chamber of Mines is proposing as terms of reference the following:-

- The commission of inquiry should be composed of a judge and experts in mine safety as agreed by the parties concerned.
- To examine whether the present provisions in the Minerals Act provide an appropriate structure for legislation regarding the safety and health of persons in the mines.
- To submit recommendations to the minister of Mineral and Energy affairs on any improvements to the existing legislative structure, if any are considered necessary, and
- The commission should be funded by the state with each party paying its costs of participation.

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