



Raising the community voice in the extractive sector

Community raises concern on hazardous mining project in Penhalonga

Press Statement by Mutare Civil Society Organisations on the proposed surface mining and milling project at Redwing Mine concession in Penhalonga, Mutare.

We the undersigned note with concern the following: That from January to 12 October 2020 Redwing mine contracted a company called Prime Royal Africa(PRA) to set up mining syndicates and exploit shallow open pits (free digging) targeting reef outcrops across the 1254 hectares of Redwing concession without undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment(EIA) process. Section 97 of the Environmental Management Act (EMA) obliges mining companies to undertake an EIA and apply for an EIA Certificate to the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) before the commencement of mining activities. Redwing Mining Company(RMC) only has a valid Environmental Management Plan (EMP) for underground mining.

That for the past 10 months PRA open pits mining activities at Redwing have extensively damaged the environment and increased the vulnerability of the community to landslides, flooding, and hazardous contamination of water among other environmental concerns. Mining operations were also dominated by issues of mineral leakages, undeclared mineral sales to Fidelity Printers. Undeclared tax remittances to local authorities such as Mutasa Rural District Council, National Social Security Authority(NSSA), Chamber of Mines, and Zimbabwe Revenue Authority(ZIMRA) to name but just a few. The Penhalonga community witnessed a sharp increase in crime, physical violence, sexual abuse of young girls, prostitution, and the spread of diseases by artisanal miners subcontracted by PRA. Manipulation of local government agencies by political elites occupying high offices in central government is making it difficult for the Environmental Management Agency(EMA), Ministry of Mines, and Rural District Councils to regulate mining activities in Manicaland Province. Local authorities are reluctant to hold PRA to account for its mining activities at Redwing mine for fear of victimisation. Similarly, the local EMA cannot stop the gold mining activities of a Chinese Mining Company, Zhong Jian, in Mutare River along with Premier estates despite the government ban on river bed mining. Due to increased fear and intimidation on regulatory authorities by political elites, it took EMA 8 months to order a shutdown of PRA illegal mining activities at Redwing. Needless to say that the Joint Operation Command (JOC), the supreme organ coordinating state security in Zimbabwe, had first called Redwing to order according to Redwing officials.

That Redwing mine has renewed the mining lease for PRA to continue with surface mining despite the failure by PRA to comply with both national laws and RMC's policy on Safety, Health, Environmental and Quality (SHEQ) requirements. That RMC has not done due diligence on PRA and two more investors namely Better brands and Proper Deck to ascertain their capacity to undertake sustainable mining activities at Redwing. According to RMC, these investors were recommended to Redwing by Dr. Madondo their judicial and business rescue practitioner.

That RMC is conducting an EIA public consultation process for PRA to continue with surface mining activities at Redwing, despite the failure by PRA to rehabilitate extensive damages already impacted on the environment. Meanwhile, PRA has not fully complied with an order from EMA to stop mining activities at Redwing. Some of the artisanal miners hired by PRA can be observed digging in some of the open pits.

That RMC has handpicked residents to participate in the EIA public consultation meetings on the proposed surface mining and milling project. Information about the EIA public consultation meetings was not publicly shared especially to over 2955 households with an estimated population of 6000 residents in Penhalonga Low residential areas, Mahwemasimike, Tsvingwe high, medium and low residential areas who will be directly affected by surface mining operations if the project is allowed to continue. Information was made available mainly to former mineworkers who reside in RMC compounds such as Old West, Redwing mine, and Liverpool. These residential areas are located in the mining areas of Tsapauta, Hen 1 to 7, Rezende, and Iona in Penhalonga. That the proposed "mechanised" open-pit mining wants to take place on mountain slopes surrounding Tsvingwe residential areas. Open-pit mining will create huge deposits of soil and large waste rocks with poisonous heavy metal iron content that will wash into residential areas, gardens, and rivers downstream. Local environmental experts have warned that a high level of skills is required in managing such open pits. Open pits have the potential to compromise the integrity of the mountains by weakening rocks and soil. The pressure of rainwater moving into open pits can trigger environmental

disasters such as landslides, mudslides, and rockslides. The activity will also expose residents to air and noise pollution that will compromise people's health.

Flying or stray rocks from blasting have the potential to injure residents and destroy properties. Information gathered from local environmental experts also question the sustainability of open-pit mining on top of underground tunnels and stopes in Penhalonga. Open-pit mining will tear away surface pillars stabilising the ground leading to ground subsidence, destruction and disappearing of infrastructure, and loss of lives. Information gathered from geologists familiar with Penhalonga indicates that it was almost impossible that PRA will be able to finance the cost of rehabilitation considering that the project was bound to create a lot of overheads. They argued that the nature of the ore body or reef does not support open cast mining because it is narrow and steep. As a result, the ore to waste stripping ratio will be much higher, rendering the project uneconomic. That against this background RMC did not provide a description of their disaster plan, rehabilitation plan, and mitigation measures the investor will undertake to minimise the adverse environmental impact of the proposed project during the EIA consultation meeting.

We draw lessons from Chiadzwa where mining companies failed to rehabilitate and secure a total of 91 deep open pits and 12 slime dams created by diamond mining activities. Chiadzwa area has been declared malarious by health officials. Open pits and slime dams have become a breeding ground for Anopheles mosquito in Chiadzwa. Mining companies are not committed to combat malaria in Chiadzwa. These unprotected open pits have also become death traps for people and their livestock. Several lives have been lost. People of Chiadzwa suffer silently from diseases such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, and skin diseases due to cumulative dust exposure from open-pit mining. Already PRA has ignored an order from EMA to backfill over 500 open pits created by PRA subcontractors. DTZ OZGEO alluvial gold mining activities in the Mutare River from 2004 to 2014 destroyed the river's ecosystem and natural banks. Their operations also enjoyed government protection and were not transparent and accountable. The destruction of natural river banks has increased the risk of floods on residents of Penhalonga living along the river. DTZ OZGEO failed to rehabilitate the river highlighting high operational costs involved in the project.

In light of these developments we demand the following:

An immediate end to all forms of political interference, abuse, intimidation, and threats on the functions of local regulatory authorities by political elites in high offices of government. An immediate end to political protection of PRA surface mining activities at Redwing that are not transparent, accountable, and threatening human security. An immediate end to efforts by RMC and PRA to formalise haphazard surface mining activities on the unstable ground in Penhalonga that has the potential to trigger environmental disasters such as water contamination, flooding, ground subsidence, landslides, and pollution.

The EIA process must be transparent and uphold the constitutional right of every person in Penhalonga to an environment that is not harmful to their health, well-being, and environmental protection for the benefit of present and future generations.

Parliament of Zimbabwe exercises its oversight function by summoning RMC to account for facilitating opaque mining activities at Redwing that are violating human rights.

The government must table the Mines and Minerals Amendment Bill (MMAB) and the Provincial and Metropolitan Councils Bill in parliament to enable citizens to contribute reforms that protect human rights in natural resource exploitation in Zimbabwe.

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