CHAMBER OF MINES of South Africa

MIKE TEKE: KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT ELECTRA MINING INNOVATION IN MINING WORKSHOP HOSTED BY WOMEN IN MINING SOUTH AFRICA (WIMSA)

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South Africans say “wa thint’ abafazi, wa thint’ imbokodo”.

Many translate it as “you strike a woman, you strike a rock”.

A more nuanced translation is that touching a woman is like touching a grinding stone, which represents the heart of any rural home.

For it is the women of southern Africa who have often borne the brunt of being mother and father, daughter and son, teacher and provider in the absence of the menfolk.

As part of my speech at the last AGM of the Chamber of Mines of South Africa, I spoke on a range of matters and touched on Health and Safety in our industry. This is an extract from that speech that recognises the role women have continually played in our industry:

“But as we talk of human loss… I want to salute all those women of South and Southern Africa who, over the past century and more, saw their husbands and sons going off to remote locations to go and search for better livelihoods in the mining industry. Some returned home gallantly every holiday to fulfil their family obligations. Some never returned home. Beyond the pain suffered by women as mothers, sisters and wives, I am encouraged that women are indeed taking a keen interest in mining. Some are employed in key roles, some are entrepreneurs and others are still searching for key opportunities for meaningful participation in the industry, and this is fully supported. We must acknowledge that the path for women in the industry has not been straight and smooth, and as employers it is incumbent on us also to establish a working climate and conditions in which women feel welcome and secure”.

Having been asked today to speak about the role of women in mining and transformation I hope you will forgive me if I broaden the topic further, and talk about “women **and** mining”.

Because even though women have only really entered mining workplaces in recent years, they have been the bedrock of this industry for many years.

PUTTING SOUTH AFRICA FIRST

Directly, mining has an impact on those working within the sector, at all levels and in all areas. It has an impact on the women who live in the communities in which mining operations take place, and on the women who live in the labour sending areas of South and Southern Africa.

Indirectly, the industry's input spreads itself far wider. The financial health of our companies has an impact on women working in downstream industries and in sectors which provide services to the industry. In good times there are more jobs and business opportunities available. In a slump, they are affected as much as those directly employed in the industry.

And through the overall contribution of mining to South Africa's economy, we have an impact on the lives of women who are not even remotely connected to or engaged in mining.

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Having taken our discussion so very wide, allow me to go back to the beginning and to start by talking about women in mining.

I hope too that you will forgive the incongruity of my standing up here and telling you about an area in which all of you are far more expert than I am – you who have lived the experience of being a woman in the mining industry.

The first thing to acknowledge is that – although the representation of women in the mining sector has improved tremendously since the laws preventing them from working underground were scrapped – we still have far more to do to ensure that yet more women feel that the mining sector is one in which they have a career and a future.

In 2002, there were around 11,400 women working in the mining industry. By the end of 2015, that number had risen to around 53,000. Yes, that is a five-fold increase, but off a very low base. And while women now represent around 10% of people employed in mining, they are still not necessarily in mainstream mining activities or in leadership positions.

At the most basic – critical – level, we need to ensure that women employees are safe in their jobs. This is both in the more general sense that all our employees must be safe, but - maybe more importantly – in ways specific to the reality of being a woman working underground.

In fact, the reality of women's lives in South Africa is one where you are often at risk of harassment, sexual violence and possible death at the hands of the men around you. How much more so as a woman underground, possibly one or two women working with several hundred men. Over the last few years we have heard some tragic stories of women assaulted, raped and even murdered in their workplaces.

While we actively recruit women to work in all areas of our operations, we would be failing in our duty of care towards our employees if we did not ensure they are coming into jobs where they are safe. This is an area that the Chamber of Mines, and in particular Dr Elize Strydom, who heads up Employment Relations, had spent a lot of time investigating, and coming up with recommendations.

Some of the initiatives implemented as a result of the Chamber-led task team include Buddy" systems, panic buttons, two-way radios, tracking systems, securing vulnerable areas on a mine, sealing off abandoned areas, self-defence training, regular visits by supervisors and an intimidation hotline.

Ensuring women's safety also means making sure that working clothing and safety equipment are appropriate for women.

Women working underground have clothing and equipment requirements which are in many cases entirely different to those of their male colleagues. Overalls need to be a different shape to men's – and concepts like side slits for additional ventilation make life difficult for women, and may mean they have to wear even more clothing, defeating the purpose.

Sizing is entirely different too – a small woman is unlikely to be able to work comfortably in an overall meant for a small man. Webbing and strapping for safety and other equipment will sit differently – and sometimes problematically – on a woman's body.

Women mineworkers need their own proper surface changing facilities and underground ablution facilities, which are secure for them and their possessions, and which meet women's particular health and sanitary requirements. It is not sufficient to simply partition off a section of the men's facilities.

Working relationships with male mineworkers are often not easy. The view among many men, including those who would ordinarily consider themselves progressive-thinking, that women don't belong underground. This

includes those who find it difficult to accept that a woman can be their boss.

Even as gender representation targets are met, and although the more enlightened companies have provided gender sensitivity training, it doesn't mean that the norm of mutually respectful working relationships is in place. In many areas, women mineworkers still encounter significant disrespect and worse.

Women mineworkers must be able to go about their work, whether under or above ground, without having to worry that they will face discrimination, harassment or worse. We know this is a manifestation of problems in society as a whole, but there is a responsibility on us as employers to deal with it wherever possible.

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Women in mining areas – in Phokeng, in Orkney, in Mokopane, in Kathu and in Witbank – everywhere mining occurs – see and feel its impact on every aspect of their lives, even if they themselves are not miners.

Often, mining operations happen in areas where unemployment is sky-high, as is poverty, and where education is often poor and opportunities to make something of your life are all too rare.

This means that – in areas like the platinum belt, or the northern Cape, or up at Richards Bay, it is not just the local communities who are looking to the mining operations for jobs, infrastructure and service delivery, but also many thousands who flock there from other parts of the country.

The town of Rustenburg, for example, has nearly doubled its population as the result of mining-related migration. Men (and some women) will move there looking for work on the mine – and others will be attracted by the growing population of mineworkers who all need services one kind or another – accommodation, cooked food, laundry, transport, entertainment. Many – if not most – of that migrant population is likely to be housed in informal settlements, as the state's ability to provide housing is outstripped by the numbers coming in.

The risks facing women in those circumstances were painfully detailed in MSF's research report released last month – looking into rates of sexual violence in the Rustenburg area. While we cannot say "it is mining's fault" – we have to acknowledge the impact of mining on the communities where we operate.

And for women from communities on whose land we operate, there are additional challenges. They may have been relocated from their family homes and traditional grazing and crop lands. They may have seen them dug

up or disappear under tailing dams. They are likely to find themselves 'competing' for scarce resources – from water and jobs to houses and electricity with an ever-increasing flood of people.

They will also see the very environment in which they live change. Often – for them – it will be for the worse. We have heard this fear all over the country, including at places like Xolobeni.

While acknowledging all of this, we should not lose sight of the benefits that mining can and often does bring to 'host' communities. Often playing the role of a surrogate for the state, houses are built, water and sanitation services provided, schools repaired and rebuilt, classrooms equipped, roads tarred and at least some jobs provided.

The problem is that it is often not enough. And, also, that our involvement as providers of resources can result in fractures and conflicts within communities – causing more hardship and creating long-lasting resentment of the industry.

For the women in labour sending areas across South and Southern Africa, mining has as much impact as for those where mining happens.

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We have said it before, and will say it again – whenever we speak of the benefits of the industry, of the gains that the extraction of minerals provided to our country and our people, we must acknowledge the mixed history that accompanies those benefits.

They would have come from across the country and the sub-continent – from Lesotho and Mozambique and Botswana and Malawi, from KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, and from the areas and settlements around Johannesburg. Some may have come willingly, many more would have felt they had no other option.

The migrant labour system that provided South Africa's mines with the never-ending supply of labour they decided they needed to chase gold, diamonds and profit is one of the most shameful aspects of our country's history.

That, in the quest to ensure the mines had the labour they needed, successive South African governments chose to entrench a system which did so much indiscriminate damage to so many – a damage that continues today, that reverberates in families and communities generations later – is a lasting legacy, and a challenge that remains with us in the present da in the mining industry and beyond

It is a challenge that sometimes seems beyond our ability to repair. The migrant labour system was part of the foundation of the country's primary industries – mining and agriculture. Its adverse social and economic consequences became part of the fabric of our society. We have barely begun to conceptualise what the solutions may be.

Any solution will require co-operative work by the industry, government, organized labour and civil society if we are to truly begin to lift the historic burden.

We must also acknowledge the dreadful impact this system had on the women of South and Southern Africa – who, over the course of a century or more - saw their husbands, sons and brothers leaving their homes and loved ones to search for better livelihoods and the promise of a better future in the mining industry.

Many never came home, and of those who did many would have been scarred in some way. It was the women who suffered the pain, the fear, the doubt – and who had no choice but to keep the home fires burning, to raise their children in daily struggle, to keep hoping. Many women have had to care for their family members who have become ill at work. Another one of our Chamber women in mining is Dr Thutula Balfoour-Kaipa, whose role it is to improve both the health of mineworkers today, but also to ensure that mineworkers who are ill are compensated and cared for.

Unfortunately, we cannot speak of these injustices as if they are all in the past. But, we can make a singular effort to better deal with these in the future.

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The wider impact of mining on the lives of women all over South Africa should not be forgotten.

For all that the industry is struggling, and job losses are a real daily challenge for many of us here today, the contribution mining makes to the country's economy is a significant one. Not only do we create direct jobs, but many more in downstream industries. In many, many cases, those jobs don't support single individuals but many – families and extended families, in mining areas and labour sending areas alike.

The taxes we pay enable the state to provide services to all South Africans – hospitals and houses, schools and libraries and agricultural subsidies, tarred roads and piped water and electricity. And child support, old age and disability grants.

That is something to be proud of.

And a reason to fight to transform the industry at all levels to ensure our long-term survival and growth – which will, in turn, ensure that we continue to contribute to the future of South Africa as a whole.

It gives me great pleasure to see that more and more women are enrolling in mining engineering faculties around the country.

And, at the risk of straying into areas of gender stereotyping, it has been shown without doubt that women are often safer drivers of massive mining vehicles, including 10,000 ton draglines, are more meticulous in maintaining equipment, and are more nurturing in their approach to training.

In a transforming country, mining is continually challenged to deliver on its transformation objectives and women empowerment is critical. There is nothing wrong in pursuing a career in mining to be the best Shift Boss, Best Mine Manager, Best GM of a Mine or CEO. But I urge women to go further – to be ambitious, to be entrepreneurs who own mines or build businesses that will be strong service providers to all the different sectors of our economy, including mining.

I come across many of these ambitious women who seek opportunities in our industry and this has to be encouraged and nurtured through different programs and dealing with the stereotypes that this a man's world, as James Brown would say, which would be nothing without women…

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I want to end by bringing this conversation back to how I started – with women in the industry itself. We have to be able to work in a world where skin colour and gender are not an impediment to people's dreams and aspirations. Until we get there we are have to create a level playing field. And that means transformation programmes must be put in place, and must work.

Lip service is simply not an option. Let it make way for lipstick.