

**ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT OF THE MINERALS COUNCIL SOUTH AFRICA, NOLITHA  
FAKUDE, AT THE OPENING OF THE MINESAFE CONFERENCE 2021  
25 NOVEMBER 2021**

Minister Gwede Mantashe, Director General Thabo Mokoena, Chief Inspector David Msiza, mining trade union leaders (name of a senior official or two of each union), leaders of the mining industry, including my fellow Minerals Council office bearers (name those present), and all others present as a consequence of your commitment to a safe mining industry.

I greet you with a heavy heart.

We know we are meeting here today because, over the last two years, we have not succeeded in taking our industry closer to the goal of eliminating fatalities due to mine accidents. After developing quiet confidence in our ability to achieve this in the years leading up to 2019, my colleagues and I in the leadership of the country's mining companies know that there remain many lessons that we need to learn. And we know that we rely on you, our regulators and our employees and their representatives, to continue to assist us to get back on to that road.

2020 and 2021 have been years of distractions and disruptions. The April/May 2020 COVID-19 lockdown and the very slow return to normal production levels took its toll. So did our focus on the special measures implemented to enable the healthiest and safest possible return to work, and the need to sustain those measures – mask wearing, sanitising, social distancing – through the COVID waves and troughs. And since earlier this year the rollout of vaccines to our workforces and beyond.

The industry, including the regulator and organised labour, can be proud at the success of what we have achieved in managing the pandemic.

There are reasons to explain the pandemic's impact on safety and on occupational and public health performance outcomes. It has taken its toll on both the physical and the mental health of many of us. Mining needs to be carried out by a workforce in good health to be done optimally and safely.

But we cannot allow pandemic to be seen as an excuse for the deteriorating safety outcomes. Our goal of zero fatalities cannot be allowed to slip.

As long ago as the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2020, we, and many other occupational and public health experts, began to recognise that as the world geared up to deal with the pandemic, other work deteriorated. In our case, we have seen, for example, falling HIV counselling and testing levels, and reduced levels of TB screening. For individuals, and for employers with workplace responsibilities in this regard, and for public health services, we also need to recommit to better management and prevention of the common non-communicable diseases.

And, on the safety side, we see the deteriorating fatality and injury rates on our mines. The 58 fatalities recorded as at 15 November represent a 26% regression on the same period last year. And, to remind you, the fatality numbers 12 months ago represented a substantial regression – 12% - on the same period in 2019. Two years of significantly deteriorating performance!

Further, this year we have seen a 17% regression in injuries. This is a worrying deterioration following years of improvements in this measure.

Nobody should get injured or die from doing their job.

Mining remains a foundation of our country's economy. And as we saw in the Medium Term Budget Policy Statement earlier this month, mining has in fact carried the economy through these most difficult times, with our taxes and royalties both enabling the extension of social grants and helping to limit the growth of the debt burden.

But our activities need to be carried out safely and responsibly. The working environment must be safe.

Chief Inspector Msiza's resolve that today's MineSafe engagement should be convened is indeed timely.

We need a rapid implementation of the new research and technical work done on falls of ground and transport safety – the two most common causes of fatalities.

We need to pay yet more attention to the strengthening of the health and safety culture on our mines.

Mine and mining company leadership needs to become yet more visible and committed to safety at the workplace.

I need to reaffirm that our members recognise and support the right of our employees to withdraw from working in dangerous conditions.

In our industry, and particularly among members of the Minerals Council, we do not compete when it comes to safety. We co-operate. We assist each other. We learn from each other. We believe that this is the optimal relationship between ourselves, our regulator, and our employees and their representatives when it comes to matters of health and safety.

More than that, though, we collectively as leaders, can and must play a critical role. We set the tone and agenda in our respective organisations. We allocate resources, be they financial, emotional or intellectual. We can be the difference that we want to see, to shape our commitments as an industry, and to deliver the outcomes we need.

And I would like to emphasise the key point from the materials prepared for the session. This is not a talk shop. It is a morning where we all need to commit to implementing a series of actions that will not only halt the deterioration in safety performance but take us closer and closer to the goal of zero fatalities.

In closing let me add that while this is a day of introspection, honesty and humility, we should not miss the opportunity of recognising success.

During the course of the morning we will recognise several operations that have performed exceptionally well – they demonstrate to us that the goal of zero fatalities is achievable. We will also be looking at practical examples of putting into practice the use of people-centred technology, modernisation and innovation in our effort to save lives.

Let today's MineSafe conference be a confirmation and a strengthening of this culture as we recommit ourselves to the goal of zero fatalities.