

**SPEECH BY NOLITHA FAKUDE**  
**– PRESIDENT OF THE MINERALS COUNCIL SOUTH AFRICA –**  
**2022 MINE HEALTH AND SAFETY TRIPARTITE SUMMIT**

ZERO HARM IN OUR LIFETIME  
THURSDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2022

Thank you very much for that introduction, and good afternoon colleagues. Let me start by acknowledging the various leaders of our industry present today, including:

- Minister Gwede Mantashe;
- Minister Joe Phaahla;
- Minister Thulas Nxesi;
- Leaders from organised labour;
- The DMRE Director General, Mr Jacob Mbele;
- Chief Inspector of Mines, Mr David Msiza and other senior government officials;
- Leaders of the Mine Health and Safety Council; and
- Colleagues from the Minerals Council and mining companies

We all know that health and safety have to start at the top. So your being here today, representing the most senior level of our industry, is an indication of the value that you place on the well-being of our people.

The vision of “zero harm” has been a mainstay in the mining industry for quite some time now. When preparing for today, I reflected on how fortuitous the timing of this summit is – along with its theme of achieving “*zero harm in our lifetime.*”

The “in our lifetime” part makes all the difference because it signals that this is not a pipedream but something that we want to achieve with urgency.

But we know that words alone are not enough. It is the actions, the leadership, and the passion that make these declarations come alive. But so also the importance of being accountable, and being open when we have shortcomings.

*And so, let me start with an honest reflection of where we are as an industry...*

Colleagues, our health and safety performance as an industry has regrettably not been what we want it to be – despite the enormous progress we are continuing to make. Our statistics on safety tell a mixed story of the industry's performance, for example:

- ✓ The South African mining industry has had **6 months without a fall-of-ground fatality at deep-level gold mines**, and in the same vein, we **haven't had trackless mobile machinery-related fatalities in the same period**. Many of us here today know that this is good progress, given the challenges we experience on these two fronts.
- ✓ We have also achieved a **39% reduction in occupational health diseases** when you compare our occupational health performance in 2020 and 2019.

But this picture of progress is also coloured by the harsh reality that we are still losing colleagues to fatalities, and that:

- **Since the end of June, we saw four trackless mobile machinery fatalities**, which indicates that we need work harder to prevent transport-related safety risks, including scraper winches and rail-bound equipment.

The collaboration between industry, government, unions, OEMs and universities is critical, and I am confident can achieve the step change that we need.

- **As of 10 October 2022, there were 1,493 serious injuries reported compared to 1,696 during the same period in 2021.**

While this is an overall improvement of just over 12%, there is still much to do to equally prevent injuries, given our milestone commitment of reducing injuries annually by 20%.

Whenever I receive a call from one of my colleagues notifying me of an incident or fatality, my immediate feelings are always for the families of those we have lost. I then begin to question:

- Are we doing enough?
- Do these incidents suggest that our programmes aren't working?

And the reality is that many of the people we lose to fatalities are more than just employees and colleagues – they are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, caregivers and role models in our communities.

Where occupational health is concerned, we still have a long way to go. Although total occupational diseases have reduced significantly since 2014, we still:

- Have not met the milestone that there should be no cases of pneumoconiosis in (newer) colleagues who joined the industry from 2019. Six cases have now been diagnosed, all with history of having worked in the industry for 10 years and less.
- Have not yet succeeded in counselling 100% of employees for HIV or screening all employees for TB in any calendar year.

Many of us are aware, and appreciate, the fact that the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, meant that the extensive prevention, care and treatment programmes for HIV/AIDS and TB that the mining industry is well-known for leading, were slowed down by efforts to contain the pandemic.

And although we did not meet the set targets on counselling and screening, we have done very well on the outcomes target, which is reducing the TB incidence in the mining industry to below that of South Africa. This is a major achievement for an industry that has been notorious for high TB rates.

We attribute this success to our multi-stakeholder initiative, the Masoyise Health Programme, and commit to making further reductions in these diseases, and in reducing non-communicable diseases and improving mental health so that we can achieve the “healthy worker effect”.

*And so the vital question that we all must answer, both by word and by our practical deeds is:*

What will we do to protect the gift of life and good health of our colleagues, and how do we *continue* to change the culture of our industry for the better?

*One of the exciting initiatives we’ve committed ourselves to as an industry is the goal of building a Just and Accountable Culture...*

We recognise that our culture is directly correlated to health and safety performance. The example we set through the actions we take or don’t take, and through the conversations we have, or don’t have, influence the decisions and actions that are taken on health and safety, every day.

I believe that our colleagues – whomever they are, and wherever they are – need to know that if they find themselves in a situation where they or their colleagues are at unacceptable risk, they must stop work and ask for help. At present, people die or get injured because they don’t fully appreciate the risks they are exposed to, or because they’re prepared to tolerate them.

Or, worse, others might be injured or killed through the concealing of problems in the hope that they will never be noticed. This has to change.

We are aware that the mining industry’s complex history has left us with a legacy where our colleagues do not feel sufficiently empowered to speak up and act.

Today, I want to make it clear that this is changing. It may be slow, but our commitment in building a just and accountable culture in South Africa’s mining industry means that we treat every single colleague as a safety leader – capable of making decisions to protect their lives, and their colleagues; capable of helping us achieve zero harm.

And part of achieving zero harm has to do with ensuring that no woman colleague working in our industry is harmed, abused or harassed in any way.

On this front, we want to applaud the work done by the Mine Health and Safety Council Women in Mining Advisory Committee. This includes development of a Guideline and Audit Tool on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide. In addition to this, the Committee developed another Guideline and Audit Tool focussing on the provision of suitable Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to female employees. This work is complemented by the Women in Mining programme at the Minerals Council where some of the foundational measures relate to Gender-Based Violence and Femicide and PPE provision to women colleagues.

I can assure you that the work of ending GBV in our industry is top of priority for the Minerals Council. We are leaving no stone unturned on this front, and are also exploring how we can support centres of care for in our host communities, beyond the mine gate.

*When reflecting of the integrated and vast nature of health and safety...*

It would be remiss of me not to make special mention of the tragic events that unfolded at Jagersfontein.

While we are pleased that we have established a fund to bring humanitarian relief to residents which has begun delivering, the disaster was another reminder to us of our responsibilities to maintain the highest standards in tailings management. Jagersfontein also reminds us more broadly that we cannot our health and safety efforts only on the workplace; we want a health and safe environment in the communities too.

I can announce that, our Board has agreed on the need for increased and impactful visible felt leadership in the form of a health and safety campaign in the last months of this year. Through this campaign, we will partner with all stakeholders in ensuring maximum impact on health and safety among our colleagues and communities.

In closing, I would like us to reflect on a simple but yet powerful expression that sums up what our industry is all about. I am glad that Minister Mantashe is here because he coined this phrase: *“Mining is about people, not rocks.”* This expression reminds us that our industry is not only about the metals and minerals that we dig from the ground – but it is also about people: and how we better their lives, everyday.

I believe that we, as partners, can give meaning to this expression by building a healthy and safe workforce; and by truly achieving the goal of zero harm in our lifetime.

*Indlela yethu iseyinde, kodwa sizophumelela*

*While our road ahead may be arduous, we are determined to get there.*

Ndiyabulela, I thank you.