

AGM, BASF, Mannheim/Germany 29 April 2016

Speech of the Marikana Widows

Ntombizolile Mosebetsane and Agnes Makopano Thelejane introduce themselves.

We are here to tell you about the situation of the group of families whose loved ones and bread-winners were killed during the Marikana massacre; about the failure of your long-term supplier of platinum in South Africa, Lonmin to provide relief for our situation. Indeed since the events of 2012 our situation is worse.

In your statement in March this year, you, BASF, say that you have investigated, and you find that “there were no critical findings of Lonmin’s governance, human rights or labour practices nor any performance violations that would prevent BASF’s continuation of its relationship with Lonmin.”

Lonmin itself says this is what it is doing: “In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, our primary concern was to take care of the families of our employees who died. Our offer of employment to a member of every family who had suffered bereavement was taken up by every family. No one can replace their loved ones but we could ensure that the families continued to receive an income. All dependent children are now beneficiaries of the Sixteen Eight Memorial Trust, set up by Lonmin and Shanduka, providing them with schooling all the way through from pre-school to tertiary level. This is in addition to the statutory pay-outs received from pension and life funds as well as good-will payments to cover funeral costs.”

You, BASF, are saying that now it is all better.

But we say to you, all is not well with us.

Lonmin has not repaired the harm they have done. They have not paid reparation. What Lonmin has claimed they are doing to assist us, has caused more harm and division amongst us. They have excluded some of us from what they have offered to others.

I, Mosebetsane, whose husband was killed at the massacre, am now working at Lonmin cleaning their yard, working outside in the hot sun, windy, breathing that polluted dust blowing around, for the very company that made sure my husband died. I am learning no skills doing this work, that will make my life better.

There are other widows who now work underground, in the same unhealthy, dangerous, noisy and dark situations where our husbands once worked.

Working in this situation will lead us to die here, or to go home with illness like TB or silicosis, or injuries, being retrenched to die at home.

Lonmin tells me that this job is a kind offer so that I can earn the money that my husband worked for in their mines, so that I can feed my children. But for me, going to work at Lonmin was a hard choice, because I had no other way to feed my children. They do not even pay me today the living wage of R12,500 that our husbands died for, three years ago. Today they take my hard work, and pay me this small amount, and say I should be grateful to them. This is not compensation, it is more exploitation, and revictimisation: from slave to slavery.

Lonmin is proud that they have sent my children, and the children of some of the other widows, to boarding school. We say that education for our children is something we want and need; but it is not easy that our children must be away from us.

We, the widows say: "They killed our husbands. They have taken our children away to boarding school. We cannot stay with our families, when we are working in Marikana. Our houses are closed now. We do not have homes any more."

I, Thelejane, am one of those who has been excluded.

Lonmin did pay for us to bury our loved ones, after Lonmin and the police killed them. But when I went to Lonmin and asked them for reparation; they said they had already paid for the funeral, they do not owe me anything more. I ask myself, did I ask Lonmin to kill my husband? Paying to bury him does not answer this question.

Lonmin says that they have given jobs to those families of their employees who died. But they say my husband, who worked underground at the Marikana mine, was paid by some other company which I do not know while he was working at Lonmin. Lonmin says they will not pay me the legally required death benefits they pay for their own employees, they will not give me a job, and they will not help send my children to school. They tell me to speak to this company I do not even know for help.

Today, for those of us who are excluded, we do not know what our children will eat, from day to day; our neighbors help us by giving us meilie meal. We cannot buy school uniforms. We cannot fix my house when it rains.

You, the BASF company, say that you trust your partner in platinum production, Lonmin, when they tell you all is now well, after the massacre. You do not come to ask us, the families, how we are living.

You say that you will help Lonmin to improve the safety of the fire brigade, as meeting your social responsibility. We respond: what does this say to us, to our situation? We ask you again, what will you do to assist us to restore our lives, our families, and our human dignity, after Lonmin brutally killed our husbands and loved ones?

We as the widows of those killed at Marikana ask you, BASF, to contribute using some of the profits you have made over so many years from doing business with Lonmin, to our immediate relief. We ask you, BASF, to establish a trust fund of eight million Euros, to help improve our desperate situations. This is not compensation. This fund should become your contribution to social responsibility.

And so we, the widows of the Marikana massacre, ask you these questions:

Will you give us the immediate relief of eight million Euros? We ask, specifically, will you establish the trust fund to allow us to repair our lives?

We say that the actions that Lonmin has taken since the massacre – with your apparent approval – have left us worse off. We ask, what steps will you take to ensure that Lonmin meets its responsibilities in terms of compensation and redress?

We have come here to speak to you directly, to tell you of what is happening at the far end of your platinum supply. So we now ask, what will you do to ensure that Lonmin will deal with the on-going and unresolved problems that caused workers to strike, over three years ago: paying less than a living wage, failing to provide acceptable living conditions at the workplace, failing to negotiate with the workers' chosen representatives?

In your recent statements, these issues are not addressed. And until these questions are answered, there can be no resolution.

We say: Plough back the fruits.