

Gold Fields workers want R18,500 a month

Representatives of striking AngloGold Ashanti workers will meet with unions next week to discuss their wage demands, workers were told outside Fochville on Friday.

"We have already arranged to meet with them." NUM president Senzeni Zolwana had "promised", workers' representative Rodgers Motlhabane said.

"We want to meet the national executive committee. That's the only people we are willing to meet," he said. Hundreds of mineworkers gathered on a hilltop at the Mahalesuku informal settlement outside Fochville, North West, on Friday morning.

The workers were attending a mass meeting at the AngloGold Ashanti Mponeng gold mine. They have been on strike since September 25 for better wages.

"How can we go back to work if our demands are not met?" Motlhabane asked.

The workers are demanding a monthly salary of R18,500.

He said their strike at Mponeng shaft one was joined by workers at Savuka mine shaft two and Tautona shaft three, all AngloGold Ashanti mines.

Motlhabane said the reason they wanted to meet with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) NEC was because they believed the lower levels of the organisation could not help them.

"The bottom of the organisation has failed us. The only people who will listen to us is the NEC. We are still under the organisation and we have structures there to use." According to strikers, no union has come to address them. The unions represented at the mine were Uasa, NUM, and Solidarity.

"Nobody has been here," mineworker Tebza Mrembola said.

He said the NUM invited the miners to a stadium in Savuka on Monday, but they had rejected the offer. "If they want us, they must come here."

Another worker, who only identified himself as Makenzo, said he was positive mine management would come to the table for wage negotiations.

"I'm positive. In a week I think there will be a settlement. They will come to their senses," he said.

"They are killing us. They are going to regret this." He had been working at the mine for 15 years but could not survive on salary. He explained how most miners lived on loans.

"Month end is money end," Makenzo said. "You see the money on the payslip and [then] it's gone." During the meeting, workers were also told to ignore a pamphlet handed out on Thursday.

In the pamphlet, Mponeng general manager Randel Fadermann notified workers that Congress of SA trade Unions general secretary Zwelenzima Vavi, Zolwana, and the SA Communist Party's Buti Manamela addressed 6000 AngloGold Ashanti delegates at the Vaal River operations on Wednesday.

The key points in the pamphlet were that a collective bargaining process for the gold mines was in place and he asked it should be honoured.

"We have just ignored it. We are not taking it into consideration. We are not going underground until our demands are met," Makenzo said.

The demands made at the AngloGold Ashanti mines would be part of a process at the Chamber of Mines and a commission would be established to urgently look at all issues related to mining.

It stated that last Wednesday AngloGold Ashanti and other gold companies met with organised labour (NUM, Uasa, and Solidarity) at the chamber.

"An understanding was reached that the demands should be dealt with in an existing working group to fast-track the process."

It said the parties agreed to convene again at the chamber on Tuesday to proceed with this agreement.

"As we are approaching a new week, I urge you all to report to your place of work on Monday, [so] we can start working towards a safe and sustainable future together." Before the meeting some strikers gathered in a circle on a field and began singing and dancing.

A man in the middle carried a poster which read "We demand R18,500 - please Juju help us - black people are economic slaves".

A few strikers carried sticks and iron rods. Others sat quietly under umbrellas, trying to shield themselves from the sun.

They have been meeting on the hill since September 20 as they were not allowed to hold meetings on mine premises.

Workers' representatives have had one meeting with management so far, to discuss security during the strike.

"Since [the] strike started nothing has been vandalised. We don't have to vandalise anything. We will act peacefully until the strike ends," Motlhabane said.

"The biggest thing is our wages. We feel that we are being underpaid." Another worker's representative, Tshepo Motloai, said they had not had any contact from former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema.

"We don't have any contact with Julius Malema. There's no influence from outside." Several weeks ago Malema spoke to mineworkers at several mines in support of their strike and called for a national strike by mineworkers for at least four days a month until their salaries improved.

When he tried to speak at a mine near Rustenburg police stopped him and escorted him from the North West town.

He has not spoken to miners publicly since then.

One of the striking workers said he wanted to buy a house, but due to the strike was now unable to do so. He had worked at Mponeng for six years and had two children, aged six and two.

"You never know what is going to happen after this," 26-year-old Johannes said.

He was concerned workers would be fired or the mine closed down.

The strikers would convene on the hill again on Monday to get feedback from the meeting with the unions.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge