

Aurora Miners treated inhumanely, human rights violated

The abysmal situation thousands of miners have found themselves in following the debacle at Aurora Mine in the North West Province is nothing short of a human rights violation. It is also yet another example of what happens when mining is promoted as the keystone for economic growth and black economic empowerment, at the expense of community interests and human rights.

"The fact that the owners of the mine are linked to past and present government officials is not something new or unusual, it is the norm in South Africa," says John Capel, executive director at Bench Marks Foundation, an independent organisation that monitors corporate performance in the field of corporate social responsibility with the focus on social sustainability and economic empowerment.

Only few benefiting from BEE

"Senior government officials and their families are often entrenched within the boards of mining houses or indeed owning them. This begs the question as to what constitutes ethical business practices. There are also only a few people benefiting from black economic empowerment in the country and unfortunately it's not those in the mining communities."

Capel says that mining communities are crying out for a share of the wealth but are sidelined by the emergence of 'Juniors' in the mining industry and those in government who are reaping the benefits of mining. "What sickens me most is when asked in a recent radio interview how the directors of the company manage to sleep at night, knowing there are thousands of people going hungry because they have not been paid by the company, they indicated they had no problem in doing so," Capel says.

According to Capel the miners' basic rights have been ignored and they have been treated inhumanely. The Bench Marks Foundation has called on all mining houses to put in place ethical standards that govern their relations with communities and to address their social, labour and economic impacts in a sustainable life-giving manner so that incidents such as that experienced by the miners at Aurora is not repeated.