

# Outreach, Coordination and Solidarity Exchange in South Africa (November 2008)

## Report of the International Women and Mining Network (RIMM)

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## **RIMM Outreach, Coordination and Solidarity Exchange in South Africa**

### **AWID International Forum on Women's Rights and Development**

In November 2008, members of the International Women and Mining Network, Hannah Owusu-Koranteng (Ghana), Bhanu Kalluri and Seema Mundoli (India), Onge Nufuk (Papua New Guinea), Rossemary Ardaya Claire (Bolivia), Christina Hill (Australia) and Tanya Roberts-Davis (Canada) attended the 11<sup>th</sup> International AWID Forum on Women's Rights and Development in Cape Town, South Africa. Ardaya Claire, Owusu-Koranteng and Nufuk also attended the Feminist Technology Exchange, an international meeting held prior to the Women's Forum. Travel grants were provided by the Association of Women's Rights In Development (Canada) and the New World Foundation (USA).

On November 14<sup>th</sup>, RIMM representatives presented an interactive session at the AWID conference entitled "Women Activists from Mining Affected Communities Share Strategies, Lessons and Challenges". At the conference and particularly during this workshop, RIMM was able to meet our objectives of

- (a) drawing attention to the ways in which the injustices, violence and destruction perpetuated by the mining industry have particularly negative impacts on the lives and livelihoods of women;
- (b) conducting outreach to those who were interested in joining and/or supporting the network;
- (c) meeting with representatives of foundations in attendance to discuss RIMM's work and potential future support, including the Rausing Trust, the Global Fund for Women, Hivos, the South Asian Women's Fund and Action Aid International.

A RIMM strategy meeting was simultaneously held during this conference to follow up on tasks discussed at a strategy meeting held in Manila in November 2007. In particular, we focused our discussion on developing a process to coordinate an international RIMM conference in one year's time (late 2009). During the meeting, the following points were agreed upon:

- RIMM should be a strong network developed, directed and driven by women from grassroots social movements (from the South & North)
- Clarification of RIMM structures and coordination processes needed to ensure efforts are effective and responsive to concerns of communities
- Given all of our time commitments, low financial resources and dedication to community level mobilization, international conferences are costly endeavours; and as such there needs to be long term benefits for the network

- International gathering will need to have a component of international strategizing to solidify structures, develop plan to ensure a core group of members are in constant communication, prepared to intervene when/where needed
- Following the conference, hope to arrange a short fact finding visit to mining affected community, resulting in a well documented report.
- Key themes for the network to focus on in the conference and in work:
  - (a) Water Rights
  - (b) Community right to Free, Prior & Informed Consent
  - (c) Mine Workers' rights (including child miners, wives of miners)
  - (d) Violations by specific mining multinationals
- One option for consolidating our knowledge and strategies with regards to these themes could be to organizing specific strategy workshops (one on each theme) with different participants, resource people and documentation. (instead of/subsequent to the Fourth conference).

### **Community Exchanges**

During November, RIMM members had the opportunity to visit different mining affected areas where women are actively participating in social, economic and environmental justice advocacy efforts. Regions visited included AmamPondo Territory, Mokopane, Vaal, Klerksdorf and Krugersdorp. The following accounts describe site visits and provide brief background information to contextualize each situation.

***Xolobeni:*** The first visit (19 and 20 November 2008) was to the Wild Coast south of Durban to visit the AmamPondo communities. These communities are fighting against proposed titanium mining along a 22 km shoreline in the Eastern Cape of South Africa that has been initiated by an Australian mining company. Coastal operations and the resulting dust as well as water depletion and contamination will not only cause a complete disruption to the lives of local people and affect their subsistence agriculture, but will also potentially cause the extinction of hundreds of endemic plant species and wildlife, as well as affect the once thriving community-based ecotourism ventures.

Considerable opposition to the mining proposal has been voiced by the AmamPondo People and their traditional leadership structures. They are frustrated at the implicated company's unwillingness to consult and negotiate with them, and the ways in which they have been silenced by those who stand to profit from the project. Efforts to find out more about the mining development, to voice their concerns and to engage with media have been met with threats and physical attacks. RIMM members had the chance to meet with activists from the AmamPondo community, as well as allied advocates from the surrounding region. Fortunately, we had the chance to traverse across the rural homeland of the AmamPondo, attend a local community meeting at the traditional people's court,

and speak at length to Nonhle, a young outspoken woman who is spearheading the opposition campaign. Subsequently, RIMM lent support to the campaign during an interview on a nationally broadcast television programme (SABC 50/50, Appendix 1).

***Mokopane:*** From 21 to 23 November 2008, the RIMM team travelled to the communities of Ga Pila, Skimming and Sekuruwe in Mokopane with local activists. In this region, the eighth largest mining company in the world, Anglo Platinum, operates the Potgietersrus Platinum Limited (PPL) mine. Earning record profits in 2007, the company has proudly invested approximately 0.1 percent of this amount in supporting social development in the surrounding communities. In the meantime, populations in the vicinity have witnessed the deterioration of their livelihoods and communities. They report severe water shortages, contaminated soil and groundwater, inadequate sanitation, withdrawal of electricity services, forced removal/resettlement procedures, restricted farming areas that are insufficient for subsistence, no/limited access to cooking fuels (needed in lieu of electricity), lack of consultation and consideration with regards to exhumation of ancestral graves, and children's decreased access to relocated schools. Children and elders are consistently ill with both respiratory problems suspected to be caused by the dust from the mining and stomach problems assumed to be linked to the contaminated water. Frequent blasting near residential areas is damaging housing structures and contributing to a deterioration in the air quality. While local people are facing a shortage of water, billions of litres of water are piped daily from outside the province in order to meet the needs of PPL.

At Ga Pila, we met with representatives of families, including some outspoken women, who have refused Anglo Platinum's removal orders. Instead of quietly accepting PPL's forceful attempts to induce resettlement (including the severing of electricity and water supplies), these families continue to eke out a living on their ancestral lands. Despite the willingness of these women to share their experiences with RIMM representatives, speaking out remains risky and even life threatening for them. According to one well respected and outspoken community activist, Angelina, "We believe it is illegal to force people off the land like the company did here...The company denies it was forceful, but then why did they cut off our electricity and water? They don't care about our rights or our lives. They will do anything to get their platinum from here. There is no reason for us to move and we are not going anywhere until our rights have been restored."

Another woman, explained, "People have no water. Anglo ships in water to the primary school. This means they recognize that the area has become thoroughly contaminated. But the children live in this community! They are at home in morning and evening."

The consequences of the loss of food sovereignty and access to water have been undisputedly negative for the thousands of villagers, leaving many wondering how they will survive. As the ones responsible for cooking, cleaning, nourishing children and tending to garden plots, women are experiencing particular distress. According to Elizabeth, a respected elder, “We get upset when our children say ‘I want something to eat--I’m hungry.’ As women, we have always ploughed the land, but now we cannot. The mining company is taking the land we used to plough because they want to build a slimes [tailings] dam here.”

According to these women, many people in the community are getting sick from the water and dust. While those who are young have breathing problems, older family members are being diagnosed with stomach cancers. Knowing about the effects of toxic levels of nitrates and sulfites, they are concerned about children’s health and that of women of child bearing age.

RIMM representatives also had the opportunity to speak to one of the local village chiefs. He expressed frustration that Anglo Platinum was not willing to meet with community members, and while profits were being made, their promises for community development remain unfulfilled.

At Skimming, RIMM representatives heard from Anglo Platinum mineworkers and their families about their dismay at the housing and working conditions, and the effects of mining on the health of the community. Stories emerged of ‘old grannies being given food by the company and told lies’ so they sign contracts to give away the land that has been ploughed by generations for platinum exploration. As a result, elder women decided to organize as they realized they “must not give in to the company’s agenda to divide us.”

In Sekuruwe, residents were particularly concerned about the disrespectful manner in which Anglo had unilaterally excavated graves sites with tractor-loader machinery. Haphazard processes for grave removal and reburial have caused bones and headstones to become mixed up. Community members who attempted to observe the exhumation process and conduct a protest vigil were shot by police with rubber bullets and arrested.

A number of women who spoke during the meeting with RIMM representatives had participated in protests at the grave site. One woman, Rosa, recalled, “When we were at the grave site, police threatened that they would shoot us. We [women] said, ‘Shoot us if want!’ ....As you can see we are

very angry.” Meanwhile, girls as young as eleven years old spoke of being arrested on trumped up charges of “malicious damage to property”,

A number of the activists echoed one woman’s conclusions that, “The thing we must do is to call for the mining to stop until the issues around our land are resolved-- for one and for all.”

**Vaal:** On 26 November 2008 in South Africa’s Gauteng Province, Vaal, Zone 6 of Evaton, Bafana Makhanya, the chairperson of the Samancor Retrenched Workers Crisis Committee (SRWCC), and organiser Johannes Malindi met with a representative of RIMM. As former workers of a local Samancor manganese smelter (operated by BHP Billiton and Anglo American), they have joined together with widows of deceased miners to hold the mining companies responsible for consistent abuses of labour and health rights of current and former workers, as well as disregard for the health of the entire community.

In general, men work inside the smelter handling heavy equipment, while women are employed as cleaners. The women have been struck by particular chest sicknesses, have problems in their joints, numbness in their feet, and have frequent collapsing or fainting spells. In addition, as the ones who wash work clothes (theirs and that of their husbands), they are doubly affected by the carcinogenic materials in the manganese dust and residue.

From records compiled by the committee, it is apparent that more than 700 smelter workers have died over the last 10 years from causes connected to the chemical residues in the air, soil and water. Common problems include respiratory illnesses, cardiac arrest, brain hemorrhages, malignant tumors, pneumonia, meningitis, tuberculosis, and cancers of the lung, chest, and liver. Workers are hoping to pressure Samancor by raising awareness internationally and specifically building links of solidarity with those who are affected by the same companies in South Africa as well as elsewhere.

**Klerksdorp and Krugersdorp:** From 27 November to 4 December 2008, a RIMM representative visited various gold and uranium mining sites in the West Rand and Klerksdorp area of South Africa, southwest of Johannesburg. Locations included townships in the vicinity of Uranium One’s Dominion Reef mine, Harmony Gold’s tailings dams and decant sites, and DRD Gold’s Carletonville operations. In this area, land has been scarred by mining operations that have left behind a legacy of toxic tailings piles, pits and sinkholes as well as slimes dams and natural watersheds contaminated by heavy metals, including uranium, cadmium, arsenic, manganese and lead. An explicit connection between the substandard working conditions at the mine and the poverty as well as poor health of

the communities surrounding the mines is evident. In collaboration with workers, community members and Jubilee South Africa, the RIMM representative helped facilitate a process of writing action alerts, appeal letters and gaining press coverage of the particular case of Uranium One in Klerksdorp (see Appendix 2).

### **Conclusions**

Overall, these site visits provided important insights for the future work of RIMM. Although we met people from only a small number of South African mining affected communities, the time was crucial for gaining a better understanding of the mining landscape, context, and communities, as well as for conducting initial advocacy to highlight the importance of women's voices, and opening up the prospects of network outreach. Though there are certainly outspoken women concerned about the effects of the mines on their families and communities, they have little time to attend mass meetings (which are largely dominated by men). Therefore, more time and unique approaches are needed to hear their perspectives and discuss the work of RIMM. Indeed, the need for alternative outreach approaches will have to be stressed in future RIMM exchange visits in order to effectively speak to more women community advocates/organizers.

Ultimately, RIMM's initial outreach to local activists in South Africa was successful. Connections were made with community level organizers interested in participating in skills trainings and collective campaigns on common concerns with other RIMM member organizations. National and regional level organizations, including the Centre for Civil Society, Jubilee South Africa, Justice and Peace, Khanya College and GroundWork, were also in contact with RIMM representatives during this time. Meanwhile people across the country became aware of RIMM's work, perspectives and concerns through the national broadcast of interviews during 'prime time' evening television on SABC 50/50. The importance of this visit to RIMM as a growing network—and as a group of advocates seeking to support local advocacy efforts by women in mining affected communities around the world—cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, evidence from the site visits related to water and health rights, corporate complicity, workers' rights violations and the lack of free, prior and informed consent, validated the focus on these themes as articulated at the meeting in Cape Town. The urgency of the situation facing communities in South Africa also contributed to the resolve of RIMM representatives to find additional opportunities to connect the work of grassroots women advocates in South African mining affected regions with their counterparts in other countries. The indomitable spirit of resistance that RIMM representatives encountered during each of the community exchanges clearly illustrated the importance of developing collective, creative, innovative, and coordinated means to advance long term struggles for social, economic, environmental and gender justice in mining affected communities.

## APPENDIX 1

### SABC Interview Transcripts Dec. 1 2008, 50/50 Debate - Woman in Mining Group

Stacy: We are joined by four ladies from the International Women in Mining Network. It consists of women from around the world who have been affected by, or are interested in mining. Thank you for joining us. Why did you decide to specifically come to South Africa?

Seema Mundoli: We came to attend the AWID Forum held in Cape Town and decided that this would be a good opportunity for our Network to link with local groups here. We contacted Nonhle and John Clarke.

Stacy: What are the challenges in your country that are similar to this area?

Bhanumathi Kalluri: Our governments are not being honest with the communities and not consulting the women and not giving proper information when they give licences to mining companies. They're selling the people's [lives] and natural resources. Although we have laws, there is no true consultation taking place. The information given to communities and women is usually false, inaccurate and misleading. This is not the democratic consultative process that we desire.

Stacy: Some people may say that mining is a necessary activity in the economy particularly when you see people in the rural areas who don't have jobs. Mining won't make them wealthy at grass roots level, but one might argue that some job is better than no job at all.

Onge Nufuk: In Papua New Guinea the land is dear to us. When land is taken from the people they become poor. That's how we see it. Having land gives the person status more than if he has a job and no land.

Stacy: You say you will take back knowledge to Canada. What is it that you have learnt during your trip to South Africa and particularly this area?

Tanya Roberts-Davis: It is clear that people here are mobilising and don't want the mining to continue. It is important to hear directly from the people and get a sense of how people are living off the land, fishing, the kind of farming, cattle herding.

Stacy: Do you think that mining has a place in society and economic activities of a country?

Bhanumathi Kalluri: Extraction of minerals is required for humankind to exist. The greed and unsustainable manner in which it is taking place, we feel, will not result in a positive and healthy environment for future society. Not just in South Africa, but most of the African countries where mining has been the mainstay of the economy, people in Africa should be the richest people in the world. There is a direct relationship between mining and the economic situation of people but we don't see that happening. The future society and especially with global warming, climate change and ecological issues directly linked to the lives of women and children, we see that this plundering will not help society.

Stacy: What advice would you give the people of Pondoland in terms of moving forward?

Tanya Roberts-Davis: My advice is, don't give up. They must keep to their convictions. They are not poor people. They have a livelihood, they have strong traditions that are important to keep and to ensure that their land is preserved in a sustainable way; to keep this diversity along with the rest of South Africa in the name of current and future generations. To the people of Pondoland: keep up the struggle!

Stacy: Thank you for joining us. Good luck and keep up the good work. We invited a representative of the Australian mining company to join us but they were not available.

## APPENDIX 2

### Sample News Coverage of Uranium One

Source: <http://www.rabble.ca>

#### **One deadly reputation: Canadian company accused of 'killing communities'**

By Tanya Roberts-Davis | February 17, 2009

Johannesburg, South Africa—Last month South African mineworker, community and environmental justice activists celebrated an important victory. On January 23, the South African Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) granted an arbitration award in favour of workers from Dominion Reefs Uranium mine, owned and operated by Toronto-based company Uranium One. Significantly, this case affirms Uranium One's responsibility for systematic violations of the workers' rights. Representatives from Uranium One's headquarters in Johannesburg and Toronto were contacted but declined to respond.

Located approximately 150 km southwest of Johannesburg in the Klerksdorp municipality, Dominion Reefs was 'mothballed' last October by Uranium One after workers had gone on strike for improved working conditions.

At the time, Uranium One declared it would be seeking to close or sell the mine. Prior to these announcements, the mine had employed residents from squatter camps and townships surrounding the mine as well as temporary migrants from Mozambique and Lesotho. Now, a minimal temporary workforce of allegedly underpaid migrant workers has been hired to keep the mine in a functioning state. Meanwhile, South African environmental, labour and human rights organizations remain outraged at the devastation caused by this mining operation.

#### Deadly working conditions

According to the Confederation of South African National Congress (COSATU), since 2004, at least 18 workers have died of work related causes, and over the last year, four women employees reported miscarriages. Workers claim they have not had access to appropriate protective gear for handling radioactive materials, and that they are frequently ill but are denied proper treatment at an on-site clinic.

A designated worker representative, Daniel, testified that his colleagues wonder why it was too much to ask for Uranium One to provide proper protective clothing so that they wouldn't be just wearing regular overalls to work. According to him, many employees are being diagnosed with tuberculosis, silicosis, cancer and asthma, and have chronic headaches, nausea, tingling limbs and dizziness spells. He explained that, "At the Uranium One clinic, if you report a problem, the nurse will give you Panadol [paracetamol], and tell you to go back to work. Management doesn't ever believe you are sick. First, someone has to die before they might believe there is in fact a problem."

In November 2007, government inspectors called on Uranium One "to halt all mining operations" until minimum legal health and safety precautions could be met. Public records from this time reveal a number of serious regulatory infractions including observations that there were excessive diesel fumes underground, "loose dangerous rocks" not barred down, that miners and supervisors lacked knowledge about basic health and safety standards, and that Uranium One had been making "declarations of unsafe working places to be safe."

Another outspoken worker advocate, Tebogo, drew connections between workers' health and that of families in the nearby township of Jouberton. "My child is always crying about stomach pains. I think it is because the [borehole] water we drink has been poisoned from the mine, but besides this, the clothes I wear in the mine are the same as the clothes I wear home. So the children are affected that way too."

#### Apartheid on the job?

Allegations of racism have been common at Dominion Reefs, where the workforce is reportedly made up of a minority of white staff working in high-level positions, and a majority of black South Africans working underground as mine operators alongside underpaid temporary migrant labourers from Mozambique and Lesotho. With the management able to threaten to replace South Africans with a cheaper and more compliant

migrant labour pool, racialized divisions between the underground workers have been exacerbated. As a minority population in the mine, women workers report harassment by colleagues and supervisors.

According to Dineo, one of the few women who worked underground at Dominion Reefs, "If a Canadian company opens a mine here, they need to give people a living wage. They also have a responsibility to tell workers about the dangers of working with radiation; with uranium. It makes me angry that they didn't even tell workers about this. At least the company must clean up the environment, as now they have contaminated in our whole community."

Workers organize, company responds with mass firing

To advocate for their rights collectively, workers organized a committee with democratically elected spokespeople, which came to be seen as a legitimate representative body by broader civil society organizations, including COSATU, Jubilee South Africa and the Federation for a Sustainable Environment.

Their demands for respect, improved health and safety conditions as well as a living wage were ignored by Uranium One until August 2008, when worker representatives who had organized a public march were declared "medically unfit" by company management and dismissed. When negotiations failed to resolve the issue, the Dominion Reefs miners decided in October 2008 to strike until their dismissed colleagues had been reinstated and working conditions had been improved. Uranium One promptly responded by firing all 1400 workers.

Workers unequivocally refute the notion that mining is economically benefiting their communities. Daniel asserted that, "This mine has created poverty. Uranium One is stealing our minerals. As workers and as the community, we don't want any Canadian mining company here killing our brothers and sisters."

Canada firm 'has taken our land and contaminated our water'

In the squatter camps and townships situated within and adjacent to Uranium One's property, families live in tin shacks amongst open mine shafts, sinkholes, mine tailings and mounds of rotting garbage. Discussing the community's sense of dispossession, Tahlita, a community organizer from the local group "Justice and Peace," stated, "We don't have electricity or water services, our houses are very cracked, and there are no jobs here. We want work, but we want our health also. In the past, we had land for our children. Now we don't have anything. The mine has taken our land and contaminated our water."

The trickle of water from the one functioning tap in the community has a distinct yellow tinge and sickening odour. Meanwhile, the suffocating effects of radioactive tailings dust blowing across the 14,000 hectare area leased by Uranium One are exacerbated during the frequent exploratory mine blasting being conducted by Uranium One's subcontractors. Eye irritations and severe cases of asthma are common amongst children and adults and many have festering rashes discolouring their entire bodies.

Despite the fact that sinkholes and open shafts pose a specific danger to children, Uranium One has done nothing more than erect a small number of warning signs in some residential areas. Parental concerns about this situation became a heart wrenching reality in November 2008 when a ten year old boy, known in the community for his creative dance and musical skills as well as good academic achievements, slipped accidentally into an open mine pit filled with radioactive waste water and drowned. Now an outspoken critic of the mine, this boy's mother declared, "For the sake of our children and the future, they [Uranium One] must close up all the pits in the area, cover up the places where dangerous materials are, and clean up the entire area so that it is a proper living place for a community."

Your pension dollars at work

A fellow community organizer from Justice and Peace, Lesago, explained, "Uranium One needs to resettle the entire community to a place where we can at least start our lives again. Our lives are in danger as the water and vegetables here are not suitable for our health [due to heavy metal contamination]...." Gesturing towards piles of garbage and mine tailings beside a grouping of dilapidated houses, Lesago affirmed, "When you see this injustice, you have to react; you have to make your voice heard. As a parent, I am doing this work for my child's sake and for everyone's children here."

Uranium One's Dominion Reefs operations have been made possible with backing from the Canadian Embassy and Canadian International Development Agency in South Africa, which have both identified mineral extraction as an investment sector priority.

Ordinary Canadians contributing to the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) also unknowingly are implicated in perpetuating this disaster, as the CPP invests millions of dollars annually into Uranium One.

In the past, Canadians took a principled stand against apartheid in South Africa. Now instead of directing our efforts towards a distant regime, South African social movements are calling on us to look closer to home -- the board rooms of mining companies on Toronto's Bay Street.

*Tanya Roberts-Davis is currently working with the International Women and Mining Network on a publication profiling women's experiences from communities impacted by and resisting mining operations.*