

## **NATIONAL DAY OF HEALTH & SAFETY IN MINING 2020**

### **SPEAKING NOTES – THEMBA MKHWANAZI**

**17 JULY 2020**

- Chief inspector David Msiza, and Dr Ndelu, Mziwakhe Nhlapo, Gabriel Nkosi, Hanlie van Vuuren and Franz Stehring representing organised labour, Thabo Dube and Masanda Peter from the MHSC, fellow mining industry CEOs, colleagues, friends and all stakeholders in South Africa's mining industry.
- Today is the third annual National Day of Health and Safety in Mining convened by the Minerals Council on behalf of its members. Again, we call on all members at each and every one of your operations and other facilities to devote a day sometime in the next month to make an extra effort beyond your daily efforts to renew management and all employees' focus on health and safety as we continue to achieve the goal of eliminating occupational fatalities from our industry.
- While in 2019 the industry achieved a 37% improvement measured by the number of fatalities, we knew, and had to keep on reminding ourselves, that this could not be any cause for complacency. We still remained a long way from our goal.
- It was in this context that 2020 brought a new, unanticipated challenge. By February it was clear that South Africa, and the world, was dealing with a major public health emergency.
- Every mining company has had to focus on COVID-19 and our operations' responses to it. It has been a mammoth task that has had to be carried out under difficult circumstances.
- Our mines have had to reopen slowly and gradually. And the return to work has involved a whole range of new working practices aimed at ensuring a workplace where employees would be as protected as possible from transmission of the virus. It has involved additional PPE, social distancing in normally crowded environments and other hygiene methods.

- One of our greatest contributions we can make as an industry, and one of our real obligations, is protecting vulnerable people. Companies are consciously encouraging employees with co-morbidities to come forward and disclose them. We are working hard to deal with the stigma that has arisen on COVID-19, using the lessons we learned over the years in dealing with HIV.
- The trends and outcomes thus far indicate the effectiveness of the risk assessments and their implementation by our health and safety experts and operational management, and the leadership we have shown in this regard.
- Our industry's rate of testing is currently 63% higher than that of the country as a whole. So no one should be surprised that the incidence rate detected in our industry is similarly higher than for the country as a whole.
- It has certainly brought the subject of health clearly into focus and the resilience of our industry owes much to the progress we have made, and the systems and protocols that we have in place on the health front, especially in respect of TB and HIV/AIDS.
- We can be proud of the incisive ways we have dealt with the pandemic from the very outset. At the same time, we sadly mourn the deaths of 45 colleagues due to the virus. Every one of those colleagues had families, friends and others who cared about them. These are difficult and troubling times we are living through.
- The pandemic has caused personal and communal stress for each and every South African. It has brought home to many of us the importance of mental health in the workplace along with the occupational, public and lifestyle health issues we are more familiar with.
- This should cause us to treat each other with respect and kindness. It should cause us, especially we managers, to go about our work with understanding of the stresses that colleagues may be experiencing during these times.
- In this environment with such an intense focus on COVID-19, it has been difficult to maintain the impetus towards zero harm in the occupational health and safety areas

we have been taking on increasingly effectively over the past 26 years. There have been periods in recent months when our safety performance has shown signs of regression. In fact, the last quarter of 2019, and the first quarter of 2020 were less than satisfactory.

- A point was reached several weeks ago that we had to draw our attention to the regressive trend that seemed to be threatening. Minerals Council president Mxolisi Mgojo and I wrote to all mining industry CEOs to urge a renewed focus on safety.
- We hope this helped. Today we are at a point where we have experienced a 4% reduction year-to-date, 23 fatalities compared to 24 during the same period last year. When we take into account the fewer number of shifts worked in the period due to the lockdown, it does regrettably mean a poorer safety performance.
- We need to reinforce our efforts to anchor all we do around the elimination of fatalities due to occupational accidents and diseases, even as we continue to deal effectively with the public health risks -particularly HIV, TB and now COVID-19
- We need to use the well-considered analysis of the well-researched data to optimise the action we take to learn from those lessons.
- We need to look at case studies and fully understand what we can learn from them. And then we need to take the decisions needed to implement those lessons.
- It is not only COVID-19 and occupational health and safety issues that we need to be conscious of. Three weeks before the lockdown, the Minerals Council launched a campaign against sexual and gender-based violence. The lockdown period did much further to draw our attention to this, and the impact it has on women on our mines and in our communities. We need to intensify the campaign we launched in March.
- We need to raise our sights and look for what is possible. We need to seek and see those possibilities. And we need to do it not only as mine management. We need to work in cooperation and in concert with our regulator and with the trade unions representing our employees. on all our health and safety challenges – whether occupational or otherwise.



- We know we can do it. Mining has always succeeded in doing more.
- When it comes to health and safety, prevention is always better than cure. We understand critical controls. We understand risk management. We need to spare no effort to use these tools optimally.