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To all media houses

COPE CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION ON MINING REHABILITATION AFTER STILFONTEIN TRAGEDY

For immediate release.

The Congress of the People (COPE) demands that the government take urgent action to enforce the Mining Rehabilitation and Mine Closure Act, following the recent tragedy in Stilfontein, Northwest, where illegal mine workers were trapped underground.

The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy's failure to ensure mine rehabilitation and closure has left illegal miners in dangerous conditions, exposing the government's serious neglect.

The Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) of 2002 sets the rules for mining in South Africa. It requires mining companies to follow strict environmental rules, including restoring land that has been damaged by mining activities. Other laws, like the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), the National Environmental Management: Waste Act, and the National Water Act, also require mining companies to protect the environment and plan for the closure of mines.

Despite these laws, many mining companies - especially legacy Mines, pre-1994 mines - have failed to submit or follow proper rehabilitation and closure plans.

"We cannot allow mining companies to abandon our communities and put them at risk by failing to rehabilitate the land. This neglect creates opportunities for illegal miners, including foreign criminals, to take advantage of the situation, as we saw in Stilfontein," said COPE Acting National General Secretary Eric Mhlapamaswi.

COPE also blames the government for not enforcing the law and suspects corruption in the sector that allows mining companies to ignore their responsibilities. The party calls for a commission of inquiry to investigate the illegal mining crisis and its links to corruption.

COPE believes that the current crisis could also be an opportunity to create jobs, with both the government and private sector working together to rehabilitate old mines like those in Stilfontein.

However, the party stresses that the government's failure to act is making the situation worse, endangering both illegal miners and the wider community. The government must prioritise enforcing mining laws to prevent further loss of life and ensure that mines are safely closed.

The consequences of abandoned mines include:

- Unattended mine openings and derelict buildings present a physical hazard to those who are tempted to explore them.
- Open deposits of mine waste may result in environmental impacts, such as damage to the quality of water, soil, and air.
- Depending on the nature of the site, vegetation may be slow to regrow, and the biodiversity of the sector may be permanently reduced.

Negative social impacts on neighbouring communities may linger for decades after the mine closure.

END!

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