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Inyanda

Statement on the assassination of community activist, Sikhosiphi Bazooka Rhadebe

The assassination of community activists fighting against mining interests in rural communities is becoming an extremely worrying trend in South Africa.

Inyanda National Land Movement condemns the assassination of Comrade Bazooka, the threats and the intimidation of the leadership of Amadiba Crisis Committee. As a national land rights movement we demand swift government action against the Australian mining company (MRC)!

On 23rd March 2016 we woke up to the news of the brutal murder of a community activist, Sikhosiphi Bazooka Rhadebe in his home in Mbizana, Eastern Cape the previous night. Bazooka was chairperson of Amadiba Crisis Committee against mining interests in the Wild coast. His assassination has received worldwide condemnation, and a petition has been signed to put a moratorium on mining prospects in the area.

Bazooka's killing is not the first assassination of community activists against mining prospects in rural communities in South Africa. In their 24th March 2016 article entitled "*Murder deepens the mining nightmare for rural communities*", published by the Centre for Law & Society, in response to Bazooka's assassination, Mbhekiseni Mavuso & Brendan Boyle wrote "Similar acts of intimidation have been reported in North West, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal this year. Cars and trucks have been burned in KwaZulu-Natal, protesters including women have been wounded by police rubber bullets in Limpopo. In North West, one activist has had his home vandalised, others have been assaulted. Threats of death are frequent".

Furthermore, Amnesty International 2013 report documented the assassination of Kevin Kunene, who was a founding chairperson of the KwaMbonambi Environmental Group, which vehemently opposed mining prospects of Richards Bay Minerals in KwaMbonambi, KZN. The 2013 Amnesty International report documented Kevin Kunene's assassination as follows "In July [2012], an environmental rights activist and survivor of torture, Kevin Kunene, was shot dead 10 days after he and three others lodged a complaint of corruption with the Public Protector against the KwaMbonambi Tribal

Authority. No suspects had been brought to trial by the end of the year”. As an environmental rights activist, Kevin Kunene vehemently opposed Richards Bay Minerals, and later exposed corruption implicating high profile politicians and other authorities in the same company, and paid the high price for it, death.

Furthermore, on 5th June 2015 The Mail & Guardian reported that a community activist from Makhaseni, near Melmoth, KZN received death threats after vehemently opposing mining interests, by an Indian mining giant, Jindal, in his community. Mbhekiseni Mavuso is currently living in hiding as a result of these death threats. Mavuso is a co-author of “*Murder deepens the mining nightmare for rural communities*” cited above, which also tells his story in detail.

In the wake of increasing death threats and assassinations of community activists against mining prospects in some parts of South Africa, an important question to ask ourselves is: what can be done to protect community activists who protest against mining interests in their communities?

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