



NUM throws full weight behind Anglo silicosis claimants

By: [Martin Creamer](#)

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South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has thrown its full weight behind silicosis sufferers' claims against diversified mining major Anglo American.

While the NUM is again angered by a 27% increase in mine fatalities in the first three months of 2011, it says that the number of deaths from respiratory disease are even greater than those from mining accidents.

Anglo American South Africa is the defendant in a litigation case brought by law firm Richard Meeran & Co against Anglo American plc on behalf of 18 former AngloGold employees.

The NUM has resolved to support every mine-worker and ex-mine worker who is attempting to seek recourse against mining companies, including the effort of the AngloGold 18 against Anglo American, and it will do so on its own terms, and not necessarily on the terms of the lawyers representing the claimants.

Thousands of South African miners have contracted silicosis and silicotuberculosis in the last 100 years of mining and the Mine Health and Safety Council has launched a series of roadshows to increase awareness of silicosis, an incurable occupational lung disease caused by the inhalation of crystalline silica dust, and marked by lesions in the upper lobes of the lungs.

Both Anglo chair Sir **John Parker** and Anglo CEO **Cynthia Carroll** announced in their introductory remarks at last month's annual general meeting in London that the company would assist former miners in South Africa who are ill with silicosis and silicotuberculosis and who are suing the company.

Without admitting any liability, Anglo is proposing to the claimants' lawyers that it will pay for healthcare until the court case is completed. The trial is expected to start only in 2012.

General secretary Frans Baleni read out yearly statistics, which recorded the deaths of 5 396 miners from respiratory diseases from 2003 to 2009.

The NUM has also resolved to extend its enforced "mourning" period for every mining-sector fatality to both the construction and energy sectors.

The NUM is concerned that mine fatalities have increased by 27% to 50 in the first quarter of 2011.

A national countrywide day of mourning sometime in September or October, ahead of South Africa's health and safety summit, will be preceded by provincial protest action, beginning on Saturday May 7 in Rustenburg, covering the platinum and gold sectors in the North West province.

"If accidents do not cease, we've been mandated to embark on further similar action," Baleni added.

Gold mining remains the epicenter of fatalities, followed by platinum and then coal, and the major causes of deaths are fall-of-ground, rockbursts as well as machinery and transportation. The NUM is opposing outsourced transport, which it says is at the center of accidents.

The labour union praised the Department of Mineral Resources for the introduction of its new online



minerals licensing cadastre, but slated the department's lack of law enforcement capacity, which, it says, results in ultimate job losses.

The Imbabala operation, in Ermelo, was singled out as being allowed to continue to function even though its mining rights had lapsed, ultimately resulting in the loss of hundreds of jobs. Imbalala had converted from being an opencast mine to an underground operation without receiving official permission.

The NUM also wants a speedy conclusion on the ArcelorMittal/ Kumba/Imperial Crown Trading saga, in which 21,4% of the Sishen iron-ore mine has reverted to State custodianship. The NUM would like to see a settlement that benefits the economy through low steel prices.

The labour union is concerned about a new tendency in Limpopo that is said to fuel tribal tensions through the exclusive employment of Limpopo residents.

"We strongly condemn mining houses that create an impression of local employment only, as this promotes tribalism and, in the long term, xenophobia. South Africa belongs to all who live in it," Baleni said.

The NUM also criticized Palabora Mining Company's employee share ownership plan for being limited to copper and not the company's commodities. Also unacceptable was the linking of a five-year empowerment deal to a ten-year repayment period.

Unhappy with the alleged slowness of State-owned power utility Eskom to implement a minimum service level agreement, the NUM warns of "disastrous consequences" as a result of the parastatal's alleged inaction.

The NUM is contributing to the research programme of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) into mine nationalization and reiterates that "nothing about us will be possible without us".

It reaffirms its support for the ANC ahead of the May 18 municipal elections and also supports the changes that Higher Education Minister **Blade Nzimande** is proposing for sector education and training authorities, in the belief that these will yield the skills that the economy requires.