

The LRC expects South Africa to stand up in support of Human Rights Defenders

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Human rights activists in South Africa have been victims of aggression, intimidation, assault and murder, such as what happened last night in the Xolobeni region of the Eastern Cape when the chairperson of the Amadiba Crisis Committee, Mr Bazooka Rhadebe, was shot by two gunmen outside his home.

It is in this context that the LRC and many other organisations and human rights defenders in this country and throughout the world expect South Africa to vote in favour of a resolution calling for the protection of human rights defenders.

Today the Amadiba Crisis Committee has made a statement regarding last night's murder of its chairperson. The Legal Resources Centre has extended its support to the family of Mr Rhadebe and will be working together with the community and local authorities to provide assistance during this time. We extend our condolences to his family, the Amadiba Crisis Committee and the community at large.

The Amadiba Crisis Committee has been actively opposing proposed mining in the Xolobeni area, in the Eastern Cape. It is believed by the Amadiba Crisis Committee that Mr Rhadebe was assassinated.

The Legal Resources Centre strongly condemns the brutal murder of Mr Rhadebe. This tragedy will be keenly felt by the community at large, as well as staff of the Legal Resources Centre who have been working closely with the Amadiba Crisis Committee over the past few years.

Assault and intimidation of anti-mining community members has occurred before, but this is the first time someone has been murdered. In May last year, Umgungundlovu headwoman Duduzile Baleni and residents and ward

councillors launched an urgent high court application to interdict threats and assaults by pro-mining residents.

In December, attacks continued, with armed gunmen terrorising the Mdatya village and assaulting community members. The police released the suspects in January. The Amadiba Crisis Committee and Umgungundlovu have complained that the police have not been willing to cooperate with them.

The LRC and Richard Spoor Attorneys have been working with the anti-mining community members to oppose mining in the area. Just this month, on behalf of the Umgungundlovu Inkosana's Council, the Amadiba Crisis Committee and affected community members, the LRC and Richard Spoor Attorneys filed an objection to the mining right application of the Transworld Energy and Mineral Resources to mine in the area.

Earlier this month the SA government was challenged in Geneva. The Legal Resources Centre raised the issue of the protection of human rights defenders at the 116th session of the UN Human Rights Committee. Specific reference was made to the threats and intimidation of anti-mining activists in the Xolobeni region.

Arising from this, the Human Rights Committee asked the South African delegation about the steps that have been taken to investigate and prosecute allegations by members of the Xolobeni community. The Deputy Minister of Justice, on behalf of the SA delegation, undertook to engage with civil society, including the Legal Resources Centre.

This issue will again be raised before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, at which South Africa is scheduled to present its state report next month.

We expect the South Africa government to support the resolution on Human Rights Defenders which has been tabled at the UN, titled, "Protection of human rights defenders working to promote economic, social and cultural rights".

We join the call of the Amadiba Crisis Committee for South Africans to support the community of Xolobeni. The constitutional rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association are fundamental to our democratic dispensation, and under no circumstances should the lives and safety of community activists and other human rights defenders be sacrificed for their exercise of these rights. Decisive action must be taken by the relevant authorities in response to this unconscionable killing, and to ensure the safety of other activists in the community.