

15 January 2019

Attention:

Minister Gwede Mantashe
Department of Mineral Resources

Dear Minister Mantashe,

RE: SAFCEI SUPPORTS THE XOLOBENI COMMUNITY'S RIGHT TO SAY "NO!" TO MINING

In support of the Xolobeni community and their right to say "No!" to mining, the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) urges you not to follow through with your meeting planned for tomorrow, 16th January 2019.

As a multi-faith NGO focused on environmental, social and economic justice, and a champion of ethical governance, SAFCEI has long partnered with the people of Xolobeni – who, for nearly two decades, have resisted imposed and inappropriate development that threatens their land, traditional livelihoods and natural heritage.

As you know, Xolobeni is a rural community who live off the land and the ocean. Should mining be imposed upon them, their way of life – which goes back more than 300 years – will be severely compromised, along with the Pondoland centre of plant endemism, which should rather be protected for its richness and diversity.

As the majority of the community are opposed to the planned titanium mining, and since the State is prohibited from issuing mining licences without the 'full and informed consent' of the affected community, we are increasingly distressed about recent developments.

We are concerned that the visit planned for 16th January may be an attempt to override last year's court ruling. Also of concern is the lack of transparency regarding who has vested interests in mining the area, and their actions, which have resulted in community members being pitted against each other. Additionally, the newly formed youth group, and the idea of a referendum, are creating an atmosphere of conflict rather than cohesion, with the sole aim to push through mining.

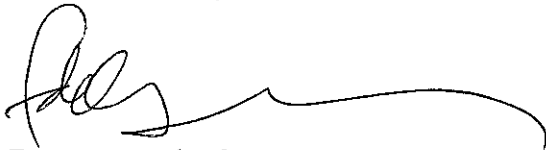
We request that you do not conduct another visit at this time, as the community has strongly indicated it would not be helpful. The people of Xolobeni have been very clear about what they want to happen in terms of the request for mining in their area, and they have been given the right by the courts to say no to mining.

Nowhere in the world has a mined area been restored and rehabilitated to its former natural beauty or function. No matter how hard mines have tried, they have not been able to recreate healthy intact ecosystems on the land, shores, and in the ocean in the surrounds of titanium mining.

Placing short-term profit before the wellbeing of people, their culture, and this unique natural habitat and heritage, makes a mockery of the ANC's promise of a more transparent, inclusive and concerned government. If the South African government is serious about respecting people's land rights, we ask that the government listens to the will of the people.

Please accept this letter in the spirit of constructive engagement, the cornerstone of strengthening our democracy.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Francesca de Gasparis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Francesca de Gasparis
Executive Director, on behalf of
Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)