

- for this piece, i'll not want you to go over the important but familiar details of mining impacts or repression of resistance — we can link to previous coverage and/or add a bit of that in after the rest of the article's settled into place
- the focus is on what has changed for coal-affected communities in the past decade, in context of talk of just transitions, shifts in the economics of coal and power generation, and South Africa's government's adopted legislation and policy moving away from coal towards renewable energy. (my guess is that community activists' reflex answer will be "nothing much", which will then need to be reported and held up to challenge from other interested parties.)
- we won't be able to publish this without substantial comment from DMRE, or a miner, or a journalist/commentator specialised in the mining sector, like Terry Creamer? or maybe someone like Crispian Olver, who was on Ramaphosa's climate commission: Crispian.Olver@wri.org)

the key questions again:

- South Africa's international commitments and climate policy point to the phasing out of coal — what difference has this made for affected communities' lived experience and to pressing their case for environmental justice both in court and in the hills and streets?
(shifting the emphasis from the by-now well-established descriptions of impacts of extractives, to ask if NDCs and JET-Ps, the end-of-life of coal plants and the changing economics of alternatives for electricity generation**. * coal mining for export of course remains very much alive, and **coal for smelting steel and other things also.)*
- what strategies, actions, allies have worked well in the past — and how is this changing? *(again, looking to prompt you and your activist sources especially to speak in terms of concrete examples of successful resistance, mobilisation, politics, and then to consider what strategies are expiring and which new ones may be emerging.)*

poor against rich not easily heard

Israel Nkosi of the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation

- rephrasing that question for the powerful — mining company and government — what forums, strategies, and actions have made for sound environmental practice and community relations in the past — and how has this changed for better or worse?
- South Africa's formal economy has been forged by mining — how do you imagine the futures of each of your communities, in terms of jobs, infrastructure, rehabilitation and redress for damage from mining, and self-determination? *(here asking what "environmental justice" and "a just transition" might look like, but again probing for specific examples where the answers are often inspiring but vague.)*

that work?

Themba interview on Dannhauser - SEJ -

as coal affected communities we support an end to coal for many reasons as it affects

so far we are working on integrated solutions so for us it doesnt help us that they still need to use coal as a power source, they are going to continue to mine. As we speak there are 200 coal mining companies coming to newcastle so the government is failing us because how could they allow so many mines to come here while it is clear that coal has deadly effects on peoples lives

they are proposing to come to castly and dannhauser - new mines

the government has made promises to the rest of the world that they are getting rid of coal but they are not doing that. we are losing trust in government that they say they are coming with solutions but the problem is not solved correctly ... allowing these mines to come here is government failing us

we have joined with interested and affected parties and we gather to push for the mines not to happy. [currently] we are pushing against this through community engagements and meetings where we meet with other communities in trying to get a solution or the way against this. We meet and share ideas to fight this as a collective

[coal mine closures] it is a fact that people will lose jobs and we are pushing for solutions on how to create new clean jobs how to train young people in working with renewable energies - webinars for young people to work in green industries

we grew up here planting our own food, farming cattle and drinking from the rivers. that has all been destroyed now - in many cases it is left unusable - if they could rehabilitate it correctly but in most cases they do not do the rehabilitation correctly and we cannot plant crops correctly

communities should involved in the rehabilitation - those who have skills - that could make a difference and create some jobs and dent unemployment as coal mining has destroyed a very huge area of land, they continue to destroy it actually because Ikwezi is continuing to expand it still still has mining rights in 16 villages so that means they are still expanding.

We are working closely with those communities in taking informed decision so that –we believe that people need to take their own decisions - to identify what kind of development they need - not the mine coming and saying what they need to develop this area - we need it to come from us as people on how we want our areas developed

people are being removed from their original land, cattle are still dying, blasts are cracking people's properties, pollution from trucks that are roaming up and down between households here. we have a new problem now we are getting threats we are being harassed and intimidated and unknown calls that we need to leave these mines alone, they are trying to

silence us or they want us to back off

fear of an unknown enemy - one of my comrades has gone to hiding but I refused because this is where I work, this is where I belong. I'd rather keep myself safe here

IRP - allocation to coal

<https://greenfuture.mg.co.za/themba-patrick-khumalo-2022/>

Secretary and co-founder

Sukumani Environmental Justice

DEFEND OUR DEFENDERS CAMPAIGN

Background Document

21 October 2025

Human rights defenders, community activists, social and environmental justice rights activists, continue to face severe threats, harassment, and violence for their role in protecting communities, the environment and the rule of law.

Community activists and human rights defenders are under siege, across South Africa. Women, land rights activists and environmental rights defenders are at particular risk. From Xolobeni (Eastern Cape) to Somkhele, Makhasaneni, and Mzumbe (KwaZulu-Natal), whistleblowers, community leaders and activists continue to stand up to powerful state and corporate interests often at great personal risk.

The safety and wellbeing of Human Rights Defenders should be prioritised and protected from threats of violence and intimidation by mining companies, the state and non-state actors. Human Rights Defenders play an essential role in defending democracy.

Over the past four years, the [Life after Coal \(LAC\)](#) campaign, a coalition of [Earthlife Africa](#), [groundWork](#) and [Centre for Environmental Rights \(CER\)](#), has held annual events highlighting the work and the dangers facing South Africa's human rights defenders, under the [Defend Our Defenders](#) campaign, with over 80 civil society and community organisations [supporting our demands](#).

This year, on the fifth anniversary of the assassination of [Fikile Ntshangase](#), LAC will host the People's Hearing for Human Rights Defenders on 22 October 2025 at the Women's Jail, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, to provide a platform for community leaders and activists to share testimony on their lived experiences and expose the growing climate of violence they face when they stand up to mining corporations and state interests that violate their rights.

The Defend Our Defenders campaign has previously submitted memoranda of their demands to the ministries of Police, Justice and the Presidency, but have received no substantive responses from any of these bodies with no progress made in the cases of murdered activists, and the impunity of corporations prevails.

Defend Our Defenders campaign actions over the past four years:

In October 2021 protestors marched to Mtubatuba Msana Police station demanding an update on the police investigation of the murder of march protest of community activist and human rights defender Mam'Fikile Ntshangase.

In October 2022 protestors marched again to Mtubatuba Msana Police station to demand justice for Mam'Fikile Ntshangase murder wanting to know an update on the police investigation on the case.

On the third anniversary of the murder of Mam'Fikile Ntshangase on 22 October 2023, LAC activists and other civil organisations marched to the SAPS headquarters in Pretoria and handed over a memorandum of community demands addressed to the SAPS leadership.

On the same date in October 2024, LAC partners and even more civil organisations marched on the Union Buildings to demand justice and an end to the violence, threats, and intimidation aimed at activists and whistleblowers. The activists, community members, and civil society organisations delivered a [memorandum addressed to the President, Ministers of Police and Justice and their respective Portfolio Committee Chairs](#).

People's Hearing on Human Rights Defenders

On 22 October 2025 LAC, civil society organisations and community organisations are convening a strategic People's Hearing for Human Rights Defenders at the Women's Jail, Constitution Hill in Johannesburg.

The People's Hearing for Human Rights Defenders will bring together civil society leaders, grassroots activists, and legal experts to hear lived experience / first-hand testimonies from human rights defenders on the frontlines and the fencelines of fossil fuel extractors. From Xolobeni (Eastern Cape), to Somkhele, Makhasaneni and Mzumbe (KwaZulu-Natal), communities will share their testimonies before a jury panel composed of distinguished human rights advocates, Advocate Louisa Zondo, Prof Tsepo Madlingozi and Dr Mary de Haas (see attached profiles for the jury panel).

The People's hearing programme will spotlight some of the numerous stories of lived experiences of Human Rights Defenders and activists from affected regions. Through these powerful narratives, the hearing aims to illuminate the daily realities of their courageous struggles for justice, dignity, and environmental protection. These stories are just a few of the many such stories around South Africa and in the world of injustices faced by Human Rights Defenders.

The hearing will provide a public platform for Human rights defenders and to share their testimonies, document abuses, and highlight systemic failures that allow these violations to persist. It aims to deepen public awareness, strengthen solidarity, and generate concrete recommendations to protect defenders and hold perpetrators accountable.

Bringing together civil society, community leaders, activists, and key institutions, the People's Hearing aims to drive collective action and advocacy for a **Model Law** for the protection of Human Rights Defenders in South Africa.

Deplorable HRD incidents that have occurred in South Africa

- *Abahlali BaseMjondolo – a community organisation dealing with land, housing and other social justice issues which affect shack dwellers throughout the country*

lost 25 of its members since 2009. Only three of the twenty-four activists have received justice through the arrest and sentencing of their killers.

- *In 2016 Bazooka Radebe, an activist opposing a proposed titanium mine in Xolobeni, in the Eastern Cape, was shot eight times in his own house in front of his family, by two men posing as police officers. He was protecting his family's farming and grazing land which the proposed mine was set to take away, depriving them of their livelihoods. Bazooka's killers are still at large.*
- *In October 2020, in the north KwaZulu-Natal community of Somkhele, activist Mam Fikile Ntshangase was shot and killed, execution-style, by four men in her home in front of her 11-year-old nephew for having opposed the expansion of the Somkhele coal mine. Mam Fikile was one of 227 people around the world who lost their lives in 2020 defending their homes, their land and livelihoods, and the ecosystems we all depend on. No one has been arrested for her murder.*
- *In August 2021, Babita Deokaran, the former Chief Director: Financial accounting at the Gauteng Health Department was killed in front of her own home for exposing corruption within the department. Six perpetrators were prosecuted and sentenced to jail terms, but the masterminds behind the killing remain unknown.*
- *In July 2023, Dorothy Mmushi, a former Eskom employee, received numerous death threats for exposing corruption in Eskom.*
- *In 2023 August 15, land activist Jomo Keromeng was shot 16 times by two men in his own home in front of his mother and child, while fighting for rights of the poor and the vulnerable people in the Sefikile village in the Bakgatla Ba Kgafela area of the North West.*

List of Resources:

www.defendourdefenders.org.za

SHRC Report on Mining-affected Communities & DMR response (use PDF and post of website)

<https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/27923/#:~:text=The%20SAHRC%20found%20that%20mining,impoverishment%20within%20mining%2Daffected%20communities>

We know our lives are in danger

<https://cer.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CER-gW-HRW-EJ-Report-on-EDs-16.4.2019.pdf>

HRD Attacks

https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/?&content_types=attacks

UNHCR Periodic Review: UPR41_South-Africa_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations

<https://lifeaftercoal.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SAHRC-Report-on-Mining-affected-Communities-DMR-response--PMG.pdf>

Women land rights activists

[Women, land rights activists and environmental rights defenders are at particular risk.](#)

LAC HRD Resources Repository

<https://lifeaftercoal.org.za/about/defend-our-defenders>

Human Rights Defenders Gathering 2023

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=morRIS-sr7k>

Human Rights Defenders Gathering 2023: Remembering Mam Fikile

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Dh6hrUn1qg>

it would be good put versions of the second and third questions in particular to someone like Eskom, the DMRE, or a coal miner.

-
- **what forums, strategies, and actions have made for good environmental practice and community relations in the past — and how has this changed?**
- **South Africa's formal economy has been forged by mining — in light of lots of the easiest/best coal being mined out, the tightening of regulations protecting communities and the environment from the most destructive mining techniques, and the country's climate commitments, what's the future for coal in South Africa?**

i've also left a note with a colleague about a possible "shortnews", which would be 490-word news story, 2 sources; so perhaps just asking one of the represented community organisations "how will the legacy of decades of coal mining be accounted for when framing a just transition to cleaner industry and energy?", and the same question to a policymaker.

i'll want to tighten your focus down to the groups facing extractives — MCEJO, Sukumani, Dannhauser, Melmoth — and it might make sense to choose just two of these rather than lose readers in identifying and explaining multiple sites and histories..

further, i'm specifically interested in a story that looks at pollution, dispossession, violent repression linked to mining (coal and also iron, if i'm not mistaken in the case of Melmoth?) in the context of the much-talked-about energy transition away from fossil fuels.

so i'd push the **key questions** across the table somewhat::

- **South Africa's international commitments and climate policy point to the phasing out of coal — what difference has this made for affected communities' lived experience and to pressing their case for environmental justice both in court and in the hills and streets?** *(shifting the emphasis from the by-now well-established descriptions of impacts of extractives, to ask if NDCs and JET-Ps, the end-of-life of coal plants* and the changing economics of alternatives for electricity generation**. * coal mining for export of course remains very much alive, and **coal for smelting steel and other things also.)*
- **what strategies, actions, allies have worked well in the past — and how is this changing?** *(again, looking to prompt you and your sources to speak in terms of concrete examples of successful resistance, mobilisation, politics, and then to consider what strategies are expiring and which new ones may be emerging)*
- **South Africa's formal economy has been forged by mining — how do they imagine the futures of each of their communities, in terms of jobs, infrastructure, rehabilitation and redress for damage from mining, and self-determination?** *(here asking what "environmental justice" and "a just transition" might look like, but again probing for specific examples where the answers are often inspiring but vague.)*

Word count:

Title

Caption

The costs of coal mining and repression of activists

what the legacy of coal mining demands from an energy transition

About

Spoke yesterday at the fifth Human Rights Defenders People's Hearings at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg. The gathering was convened by the Life after Coal campaign, a coalition of Earthlife Africa, groundWork and environmental lawyers Centre for Environmental Rights.

Israel Nkosi of the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation that campaigns against the Tendele coal mine in KwaZulu-Natal told the hearings that

“There is no justice in Mtubatuba. The justice is being served for those people who have money. For example, every time the community targets some issues you have with the mine, you will be stopped. Last year we had a planned march and our municipality is always against us.” (The mayor, mines, chiefs take decisions without us) “when we approached the area where we were supposed to have that march the police begged me to stop the march because there will be violence. How do you know there will be violence before the march starts because you guys are here to maintain peace? There are so many people that have went through different forms of violence. There is a comrade whose house was totally demolished by the mine, police did nothing about it, the chief did nothing and it was like nothing happen. After demolishing his house, he laid a complaint with the police and his case just disappeared. A woman activist was intimidated. They target women in the area. We had to help her relocate from the area. Violence will never stop where there are mines in the areas. Another comrade they shot at his house more than 17 bullets and they were shouting “you said you don’t want a mine, let’s see what you will do in the morning” and he went to the mine and was given R10 000 to make up for the shooting damage. People are depressed from being threatened

He has been in hiding. He left his car at his house and went and his car was shot up that night.

The traditional leaders in the area “they don’t care what happens with our life. The land is forcefully taken from the people. If you don’t want to give your land to the mine, you will be hunted

The mine also say they won’t give people jobs as long as there are activists in the community

The government says they are giving land back to the people but that only applies when mines are not here. When mines are here it doesn’t apply

When you slaughter a cow you can't eat the intestines because they are full of coal dust from the blasting - it covers grass and the livestock eat it and get diseased. People in our area are coughing, they are sick because they are inhaling air that is contaminated by coal dust. The water we drink is full of coal dust (rain water harvesting) from roofs. Speaking here in one voice we believe that one day, one by one (sobabamba)"

Dannhauser 1h33

Ntombi Ngwenya Bongani Radebe Jabulile Dlamini of the *Sukumani Environmental Justice SEJ*, a six year old community organisation based in coal mine communities in Dannhauser and Newcastle in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal said

Assault and violence lack of action from police forced removal from their land divide and rule tactics the critical one is the mine operating licence they need a water use licence and these must be up to date some of the mines are using the last water resource and diverting it to the mine; preventing people from accessing heritage and sacred sites where rituals are performed "can you imagine that your great grandfather's grave is exhumed without rituals being performed what will happen to your family and your future family if they cannot refer back to the grave

Mokgetha from Climate Justice Action Group (CJAG) things are getting worse and us living here we are the ones who must encounter these people who are killing others. How did we get to where defenders are being killed,

We are living in a time where the soil of Africa is being auctioned and we are told to keep quiet, be patient and wait for reform our people are tired of begging for the fruits of their own soil. When the youth try to raise their concerns they are met with rubber bullets

Our leaders speak of renewal but they protect the structures that is not renewal but the management of decline

It is time to stop admiring failure dressed as democracy

Our leaders prefer negotiations with mining companies to negotiations with their own people

South Africa's economy is based on an energy paradigm called the minerals-energy complex and this has led to it being one of the most energy and carbon intensive countries in the world. Its carbon intensity and high emissions result from two

fundamental and related reasons: its reliance on coal as its primary energy source and its policy of supplying cheap electricity to industry. More than 75 per cent of South Africa's greenhouse gas emissions stem from energy production, and more than 50 per cent of the energy is consumed by industries and mining activities.

The poignant event was held on the fifth anniversary of the assassination of 63 year old Fikile Ntshangase, a leader of the campaign against the Somkhele coal mine in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal. Ntshangase was gunned down in her home in 2020 by four men who shot her six times and then vanished. Nobody has ever been prosecuted for her murder, said Malungelo her daughter.

Reverend Mbhekiseni Mavuso, who survived an assassination attempt in March 2024 that killed his fellow activist, Mbhekiseni Dladla

"We came here to cry. We are killed so much, what is our sin? Is our sin having the land as Black people. We never said we want development and that is why people from India come here and say they are developing us, we are ok with farming bananas, oranges, naartjies, sugar cane, timber, all the fruits that you can think of. We are very developed and you won't find a beggar on the street because of hunger. Who has heard that mines bring progress because the mines make people leave their land. It is a project that evicts people. When it comes, you need to run away. Have you seen a development that digs up graves? Destroy peoples house and call that a development? We don't know such a thing. We have never said we want to be developed, we are developed.

We said we don't want a mine, we want our land. In 2018 we got our land but the government took it away with another hand. What kind of development is done by thieves. When we claim our land we claim the full package, the water, the trees, the animals but then when they are back with us we are told that the water is owned by the department, the trees are their own, the animals belong to wildlife and minerals are the governments and what we are ploughing is for department of agriculture so what is left for us? If they tell us we must claim, what are we claiming. We stay in the mountains, we are being shot but there is nobody that we are in a fight with or have taken something from. We have houses and farms and they tell us there is wealth underground and we must move, has that area been checked so that we are not moved again

Its not that we don't want the mines, we said mines should mine at the Union Buildings, there are no houses or cattle there, that is a nice place for a mine with government as a custodian

There are no children who are going to be badly affected by a mine at the Union Buildings

If you think a mine is a good thing, its like a person who owns many cattle and they ask

The hitmen showed us a list in 2011 that they were given R75 000 to kill us. From then we never had peace. I have been shot at in broad daylight. Wehn I ask the police what happened with the chase the police are quiet the case is in High Court but I have never been called as a witness. Another killing in July, no arrests. On 26 February a hit man came to the meeting looking for me to kill me in front of people. Just this week we bured tow people so every week we bury people just because a mine wants to come to the area. We are just waiting to die at any time because nobody is protecting us. Our parents live by prayer, praying for our lives. We are not happy we can't stay with our families. That is our suffering. We are in exile. In conclusion you die for the land. The land is our blanket.

Adv Louisa Zondo - justice for all is running through everything you have shared with us. There are no consequences for criminality of all sorts. Impunity for the violence, the complicity of mining companies, the police, the municipalities, traditional leadership in really violating the rights of people. Mental health and wellbeing is centrally impacted by these experiences of deprivation of rights, lack of safety, anxiety at being exiled from families and homes, displacements. Rights are violated with impunity in the quest to steal peoples' land for profit.

Tshepo Madlingozi - 7:18:15

Mary de Haas

We want clean and affordable energy and to be included in decisions. Scientists don't have to take decisions for us because we are affected. We demand transparency and information - 7:06:56

(write lots of letters asking police to follow up)

Indian mining giant Jindal's plan to prospect for iron ore in Melmoth since 2011 Mavuso was followed in 2016 by people he described as known assassins and had to

go into hiding for

Makhasaneni near Melmoth in KwaZulu-Natal

2024 Indian industrial powerhouse Jindal Steel & Power launched a new bid to have its R30bn iron ore mine in Entembeni, near Melmoth, approved. The mining giant's initial plans to establish a R30bn opencast iron ore mine in northern KwaZulu-Natal were scuppered when its application for environmental authorisation was refused by the department of mineral resources & energy in February citing compliance concerns. The project would uproot more than 300 families, exhume ancestral graves and endanger millions of rand worth of fruit farms in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

Mbhekiseni Mavuso survived a hit on March 31 which claimed the life of his travelling companion and fellow activist, Mbhekiseni Dladla, in Makhasaneni village.

Then on June 14, Sibusiso Hlongwane, who was among the activists vocal in opposing the mine, was gunned down in his village, Nkwadini.

Go to 14:30 for him being shot

Another para about the hearings

X said (juror)

Environmental sociologist Llewellyn Leonard of the University of South Africa has been researching the impact of mines and polluting industries on communities for 20 years. He told Mongabay that the continued violence and killings of community activists who resisted mining on their lands meant that South Africa's transition away from coal to cleaner energy was contradicted by what was happening on the ground.

"While policy discourses stress decarbonisation, the lived realities of extractive violence reveal that the underlying political economy of resource exploitation remains largely intact" said Leonard.

He said a credible and just transition could only happen once communities who'd been

damaged by extractive industries were paid reparations. This and “centring community empowerment and environmental accountability must be foundational principles of the transition rather than afterthoughts”, said Leonard.

The Department of Minerals and Petroleum Resources said it would respond at its earliest convenience but did not respond to questions for comment.

Photos: Zwide Nxumalo standing at his homestead in Makhasaneni Village points towards a mountainous area in the north where his forefathers used to live. Photos: Kimberly Mutandiro/GroundUp