

Statement: CSOs Coalition Demands Accountability and Precise Action Following Reports of Mining-Related Pollution

Lusaka, 6th March 2025: The Zambia Environmental Justice Coalition expresses grave concerns about the reported incidents of pollution on the Copperbelt and in Mumbwa as a result of poorly managed mining operations.

It is our view that these most recent and devastating incidents of pollution involving Sino Metals Leach Zambia Limited and Rongxing Investment in the Copperbelt province as well as Ozone Mine in the Mumbwa district are symptomatic of a broader pattern of gross corporate negligence and inadequacies in environmental compliance, oversight and enforcement.

These avoidable disasters have devastated communities in Chambishi, Kitwe, Luanshya, Mpongwe and Mumbwa - with effects still cascading to nearby areas and districts. A pattern of systematic disregard for the rule of law and authorities by certain mining companies is becoming apparent.

For example, in February 2025, the Department of Mines Safety suspended Rongxing Investment operations following a fatal accident and an acid spill into the Luela Stream, which feeds into the Mwambashi River. Despite the suspension, the company continued illegal operations, running night shifts in secret.

Further, the erstwhile Minister of Green Economy and Environment raised concerns about the stability of Sino Metal's tailing dam in 2023 - long before tailings dam 15F failed, releasing over 50 million liters of acidic effluent into the Mwambashi River, a tributary of the Kafue River.

As such, the environmental failures at these mining companies demonstrate the need for urgent reforms in Zambia's mining sector to ensure compliance and oversight.

The government of the Republic of Zambia has previously outlined a plan to elevate our nation's copper production from its current level of approximately 820,670 metric tons to 3 million metric tons annually within the next decade. This initiative is central to Zambia's strategy for economic revitalization, given that copper mining contributes significantly to our GDP, foreign exchange earnings, and government revenue.

While we are in full support of the President, we affirm the need to match this increase in copper production with an increase in vigilance and monitoring of the subsequent environmental impact. Currently, there are significant gaps in implementing and enforcing environmental safeguards and regulations. Therefore, should mining expand within the current status quo and modus operandi, citizens and the environment are at risk of widespread disasters such as those recently reported.

As a network of like-minded CSOs, we call for the immediate prosecution of Sino Metals, Ozone Mine and Rongxing Investment for their environmental crimes. We also call for independent environmental audits and the public disclosure of results for stronger regulatory oversight. Additionally, we demand absolute transparency and accountability in the independent investigation that will be conducted on the Sino Metals Leach Zambia Limited acid spill.

Furthermore, in light of these recent events, we recommend that the government consider a supplementary budget provision to the Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development, and the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) to support efforts not only to redress such disasters but to prevent them from occurring through their respective environmental monitoring mandates. We, therefore, reiterate previous calls for increased budgetary allocations to these institutions considering the significance of the mining sector and investment in the country and the huge bill to be paid when such environmental incidents occur as a result of mining activities - as we are witnessing now.

We also strongly recommend that the Government reconsider allowing mine development and operations in protected areas given the inherent risks associated with this, as demonstrated by the recent incidents of pollution.

As CSOs, we remain committed to monitoring these crises and supporting the government in its effort to contain the disasters and restore order. We call on the government, civil society, and relevant stakeholders to join efforts to prevent future catastrophes and protect Zambian communities from industrial negligence and impunity.

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