
Joint Press Release N°001/AFREWATCH/2017

“Mutanda Mining should assume responsibility for polluting the Luakusha River and the Kando Lake and for destroying population’s farms”

African Resources Watch (AFREWATCH) and the Association for the Development of Lake Kando Communities (ADCLK) working for the advancement of Human rights express their deep concern following the pollution of the Luakusha River and the Lake Kando and the damage of populations’ farms by a toxic acid that leaked from a pipeline belonging to Mutanda Mining (MUMI). MUMI is a joint-venture controlled by Glencore the majority shareholder (with a 69% stake)¹. The incident happened into the MUMI’s fenced area located at about 5 km from Kaindu, Kapaso and Rianda villages in the Congo’s province of Lualaba

During the night of 16 to 17 April 2017, a pipeline burst and released a toxic acid that spread out over farms located in the neighborhood of MUMI and belonging to populations living in Kaindu and Lualaba-Gare villages. This acid spread into the Luakusha River that flows into the Lake Kando.

AFREWATCH made a field investigation and discussed with the victims about the incident. The investigation revealed grave consequences of the pollution affecting 28 households; they include damage to maize, cassava, sugar cane, tomatoes and other vegetables. The chemical exterminated aquatic species including fishes, grasses, toads, frogs living in the Luakusha River.

The situation is likely to get worse as the waters of the Luakusha River drain into Lake Nkando, which is used by neighborhood populations for fishing and agriculture.

Beside environment degradation, the investigation revealed health concerns that the populations of Kaindu face; some inhabitants complain of itching and swelling of bodies as a result of contact with the Luakusha River. In this regards, ILUNGA NKUMWIMBA Sarah, a 31-year-old woman who was constantly scratching her body, declared: *“On my way to my farm, I crossed the Luakusha River; now all my body is itching”*. Since Friday 21st April 2017, Sarah has been admitted at the Mwangeji General Hospital, Pavilion 2, Bed n ° 4.

AFREWATCH and ADCLK condemn the silence of MUMI since the incident occurred; populations have received no explanation or assistance to protect themselves against polluted waters. So far no government official has visited the village though they are aware of the incident.

¹ <http://fleurettegroup.com/business-projects/copper-and-cobalt/mutanda-mining>

CONTACT

Even though MUMI spread lime where the incident occurred in order to lessen the toxicity of the acid, the chemical had already affected farms, the Luakusha River and the Lake Kando; this rapid spread of the acid had been facilitated by abundant rainfall.

Considering the Article 12 of Act No. 11/009 of July 9th 2011 on fundamental principles relating to the protection of the environment², AFREWATCH and ADCLK recalling the content of Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights³, urgently recommend:

A. Mutanda Mining, to:

- inform the populations of the nature of the incident and advise them about appropriate measures to be taken for their safety;
- identify and compensate all victims whose plantations have been damaged by the chemical, and relocate affected farms elsewhere;
- support healthcare-related costs of the victims of the pollution and take appropriate measures for the safety and food security of the population;
- de-pollute the Luakusha River and the Lake Kando whose aquatic species have been exterminated by the chemical.

B. Provincial government of Lualaba, to:

- inform the populations of the nature of the incident and advise them about appropriate measures to be taken for safety;
- ensure that MUMI repairs the damage within a reasonable timeframe and that the environment is depolluted in accordance with international principles on the protection of environment.

C. Human rights and development organisations, to form a coalition for the purpose of assisting the victims

D. Victims, to sensitize themselves so that their rights are respected according to national and international legislations.

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² This provision stipulates that the cost relating to the prevention and mitigation measures of pollution and the restoration sites is supported by the polluter.

³ This provision stipulates that "everyone is equal before the law and has the right to an equal protection without discrimination".

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