

HMUN 2025

Arranging safe workplaces for people in the mining industries

AU-P

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Forum: African Peace Union

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Introduction

The global mining industry relies heavily on extracting resources from African territory. A large portion of the world's minerals come from mines in these countries, which bring economic growth and development to multiple nations all across Africa. However, the mining industry has been a prevalent topic in world health, as it often also leads to multiple temporary and permanent health-related issues and is generally associated with poor human rights conditions. This is often caused by a lack of organization, resources, or interest. Seeing as one of the African Peace Union's (AU-P) objectives is to "Ensure a high standard of living, quality of life and well-being for all citizens," it is now the union's responsibility to find long and short-term solutions to address this issue and develop a safe workplace environment for the miners.

Definition of Key Terms

Artisanal Mining

Artisanal mining is the extraction of natural resources and minerals by individuals, cooperatives, or small companies heavily reliant on manual labor, and they have minimal capital investment (SGU | Geological Survey of Sweden). They generally work with less developed resources in comparison to industrial mining, as they are a larger part of rural and peri-urban livelihood.

Child Labor

Not all work that is done by children should be classified as child labor that must be targeted for elimination. Child labor, as defined by the International Labor Organization, is work that deprives children of their childhood. It is also harmful to their physical and mental development and their magnitude and life potential.

Corporate Accountability

Holding [mining] companies responsible for their impacts, specifically to mining, their impacts on the environment and the worker's health and well-being.

Fair Trade Minerals

Ethically sourced minerals that meet the Fairtrade standards, specifically the incorporation of human rights and environmental due diligence (HREDD) requirements. Some of these demands are: "working conditions are equitable for all workers" and "health and safety measures must be established to avoid work-related injuries."

Labor Rights

Labor rights are human rights. Some examples are but not limited to:

- No child labor (depends on the country, usually below 15 years of age)
- Must make a living wage (cover all the basic needs for an average family)
- Work environment which is not detrimental to their safety and health

Mining Hazards

The most common mining hazards include but are not limited to ground collapse, subsidence, toxic materials, mine water rebound, acid mine water drainage, and mine gas emission.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

The discipline deals with the prevention of work-related injuries and diseases. This also looks at the protection and promotion of health workers.

Occupational Injuries

Physical harm developed during work activities, both an injury and a disease.

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 3 and 8

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of targets with the purpose of eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, and protecting the planet. The two SDGs relevant to the issue are *No. 3: Good health and well-being*, which aims to ensure healthy lives for everyone regardless of age, and *No. 8: Decent work and economic growth*, which aims to promote inclusive, productive employment.

Tailings

Tailings are the by-product of several mining extractions. They usually consist of crushed rocks, water, mineral remnants, residues from chemicals used to collect the minerals, etc. They are extremely harmful to the environment and workers if not managed properly. The wrongful handling of such can lead to water contamination, soil degradation, air pollution, etc., all of which have a strong effect on the workers themselves.

Toxic Exposure

When contact with certain substances, natural or man-made, can lead to negative health effects, like changes in body structure or function, including illness or death.

General Overview

The mining industry in Africa has been part of the world's industrial development and has had a large importance in our civilization and standards of living for many years. The General Mining Act of 1872 is still extremely impactful in the laws that dictate mining today. It regulated the extraction of important minerals and the treatment of land after it had been used (Office of Natural Resources Revenue). However, a key element that is missing from this document, which has sparked recent controversy, is its lack of mention of the protection of the environment and human rights. Ensuring a safe workplace requires the observation of these highly important sectors, which is why the issue has been discussed for many years in multiple instances.

Modern History

The Berlin Conference (1884 – 1885) was a series of negotiations in which 15 European countries set out to divide the colonies and territories within Africa. These negotiations favored some nations, like Great Britain and France, and left some unhappy, like Germany. Shortly after the Berlin conference, the *Scramble for Africa* began. The *Scramble for Africa* is the name given to a time in which big European nations, like Britain, France, and Germany, were trying to conquer and colonize as much of the African territory as possible to form part of their separate empires (Kulik). This movement lasted from 1885 to 1910. In the 1870s, 10% of the continent was controlled by other nations, primarily Great Britain and France. However, by 1914, this had drastically increased to 90%. Two maps can be seen below, which show the colonial rule in Africa in 1870 (the left) and 1914 (the right). Each color represents a territory belonging to another nation.

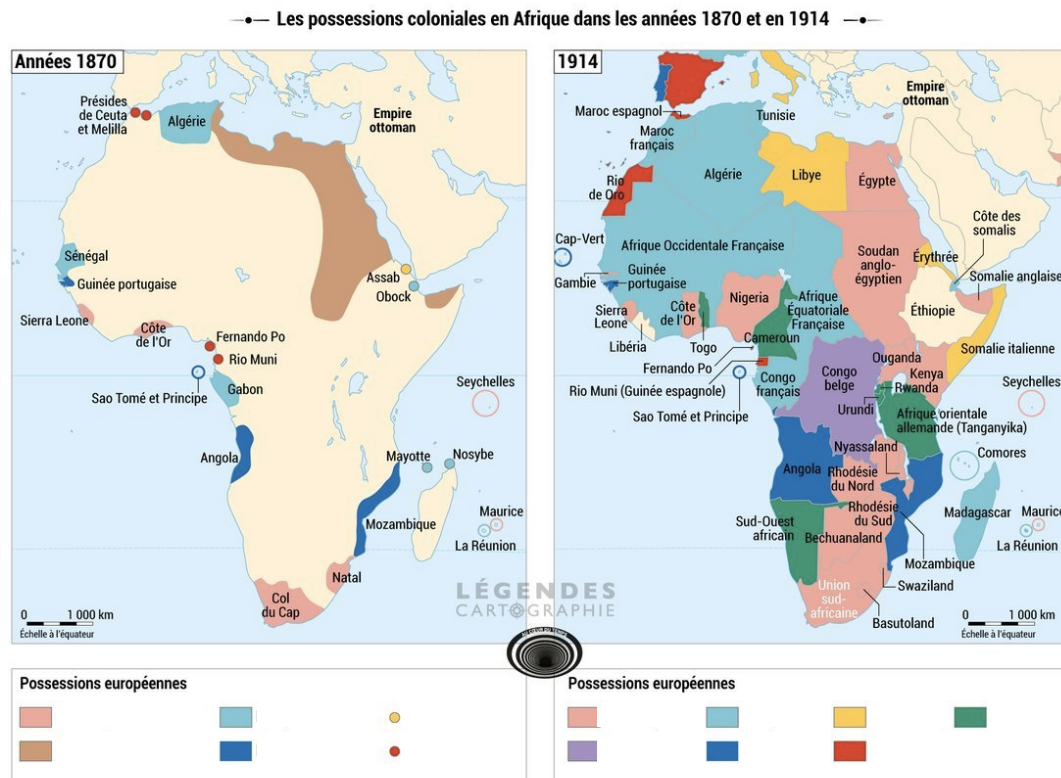


Image No. 1 Shows two maps highlighting the difference of colonial Africa in 1870 to 1914. Source - Maps on the Web

The only two African countries that are believed to have never been colonized are Ethiopia and Liberia. The end of the First World War, WWI, would bring great change to the colonies in Africa. As part of loss reparation and treaties signed, like the highly influential Treaty of Versailles, Germany lost all of their outside-Europe colonies, which meant that nations like Togo, Cameroon, and then German Southwest Africa, nowadays Namibia, were no longer under the German rule (Crowder). However, these nations were divided and given to other powers, the winners of WWI. These colonies were taken up mainly by Britain, France, and Belgium.

Then, from 1940 to 1945, during World War Two, as impactful and harmful as it was globally, even to millions of Africans who were forced to fight in the war, the colonial powers did not shift much. It all changed at the end of WWII, 1945, with the start of the decolonization period in Africa. After WWI, some countries, like Egypt, gained independence, yet most remained under European rule. As WWII ended, the colonial control over many of these nations was falling apart as colonial governments became more aware that colonies could not be kept forever and could be quite problematic (South African History Online). In the years between 1945 and 1960, many territories in Africa gained independence and finally reached self-rule. The process of decolonization was not an organized one, some nations quickly and peacefully gained independence, whilst others had to engage in conflicts to do so (Office of the Historian).

During all their times under colonial rule, many African territories and people were brutally exploited for their natural resources in the mines. A large portion of the metals used for the creation of weaponry and the development in the military in WWI and WWII were sourced from Africa collected by Africans. This would greatly harm the future of the mining industry in the continent, as the lack of care from the European powers and of safety regulations and check-ups to ensure everything was in order meant that most mining industries, which continued after the war, did not bother to implement such regulations.

Nowadays, a large portion of the mines in Africa are not controlled by the countries they are located in but by outside organizations and other companies. These large corporations often do not show sufficient care or implement enough regulations and budget to ensure that the working conditions for the miners are optimal, with some labor rights not being followed, and the safety of the collection is less than optimal, with very few minerals collected being fair trade minerals.

Global Exports and Contribution

Nowadays, Africa is responsible for a large production of mining on a global level, as the continent contains over 30% of the world's total mineral reserves and is the highest exporting country of gold, diamonds, and high export of cobalt, copper, and platinum (etc.). Africa is the home to 5 of the top 30 largest oil producers in the world, and they add over 8% of the global oil production. Additionally, large mines for valuable natural resources are part of African countries, with the largest reserves of cobalt, diamonds, platinum, uranium, and more being in Africa (ODI Global).

With Africa being a key player in the mining industry, many countries and companies are showing interest in the area and are seeking contributions. Countries like China, India, Brazil, and the United States are increasing their investment in African resources. Particularly, Chinese investment has remarkably increased since the year 2000, with Africa accounting for 75% of all Chinese foreign mining investment in 2011 (Egyin).

Recently, artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) has experienced significant growth, largely due to the fact of the increase of mineral price values. Its contribution to the global supply has increased substantially, now accounting for approximately 20% of the gold supply and 20% of the diamond supply, and around 9 million people are working as ASM miners (UNDRR). However, these estimates are 'conservative estimates', as they are generated with little data collected (due to unavailability), and artisanal mining is illegal in several African countries.

Environmental and Health Impacts

The environmental impacts of the mining industry in Africa are very important not just for the ecosystem but for the worker's health and living conditions. Pollution generated from tailing and waste (such as dust) from mines can reach the homes of the miners and the nearby towns. The pollution is transported in many ways as it can easily travel through the air. The mining industry pollutes nearby land, preventing crops and food from growing, it could also contaminate the water and has generally negative impacts on the environment.

The mining industry also has detrimental health impacts on the workers. This harm is caused in many ways, from OHS, occupational injuries due to inadequate working conditions, harsh environment, mining hazards, and environmental pollution. Mining is an industry that poses high risks of injury. In 2017, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics calculated that there were around 10,200 non-fatal injuries and illnesses caused by the American mining sector. In addition to these, a lot of the injuries or diseases could become fatal and lead to death in several different scenarios (Cannizzaro, Bridges, Jilisky & Streng, LLC). Some examples of physical injuries caused by mining hazards are sprains and strains (to the back, shoulders, and ankles), fractures due to falls or falling terrains (13.8% of all mining-related injuries), lacerations due to the environment, hand tools, and improper safety materials (11% of all mining-related injuries).

Another common health factor are diseases and illnesses. The majority of illnesses caused by mining activities are mainly respiratory, such as pneumonia, asbestosis, COPD, or tuberculosis. A lot of these have little to no treatment, and in rural areas where mining usually takes place, the workers do not have access to any medication or treatment. Additionally, low wages and insufficient money can lead to many workers' inability to purchase the treatment. Missing days from work due to the injuries means an even greater loss in their wages, which many families cannot afford. This results in the continuous development of the diseases. Many of these diseases are easily transmitted through the air and in the confined spaces that mines are, it is very common that miners who develop these diseases spread the viruses and illnesses to other workers.

Human Rights

The mining industry also presents important human rights considerations. A common presentation of violations is in the working conditions, which are inhumane and lead to catastrophic or even fatal injuries and diseases. Additionally, there is the issue of gender inequality, as the industry is largely run by men, and women have not been able to participate in the mining industry for years. Currently, women make up 15% of the entire global mining industry. However, the COVID-

19 outbreak brought the need for workers, which allowed more women to join the sector. Within the workers, a large portion is made up of children. It is believed that over one million children work in mines and quarries worldwide (2019) (ILO). This a serious violation of children’s rights, which is something that the United Nations and the AU-P are highly concerned with resolving. Finally, a large sector of the working population is forced labor and can be considered modern work slavery. Mainly, children and women are not working voluntarily and, in some cases, are abused in the mines.

Criminal activities within the mines, as well as illegal miners, pose another danger. There is a significantly large sector of mines that are illegal and controlled by gangs or criminals. Within the South African province of Gauteng, it is believed that there are over 36,000 illegal miners who own large gold and other mines (Nomsa Maseko). A lot of the gangs use heavy weaponry and artillery to protect their mines, which only increases the dangers and rates of violence in the areas.

Ensuring the development of safe workplaces in Africa is a topic that has been discussed by the United Nations (UN), the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the African Union (AU) in previous years. Some of the most notable discussions have been the ILO's *176 Convention: Safety and Health in Mines* of 1995 and the AUP's *African Mining Vision* from February 2009. These two laid out explicit plans and instructions on how to manage the industry and ensure the health of the workers, human rights, and an improved workplace within the mining industry.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
1880's	Beginning of <i>The Scramble for Africa</i>
November 15 th , 1884 – February 26 th , 1885	Berlin Conference (negotiations about the division of African territory – favored some countries more than others)
July 28 th , 1914	Start of WWI
November 11 th , 1918	End of WWI
June 28 th , 1919	Signatory of the Treaty of Versailles (Germany lost all its colonies in Africa)

September 1st, 1939	Start of WWII
September 2nd, 1945	End of WWII
1945 - 1960	African decolonization (Independence)
1995	ILO 176 Convention: <i>Safety and Health in Mines</i>
February 2009	AUP <i>African Mining Vision</i>

Major Parties Involved

South Africa

South Africa is the biggest mining nation in the entire world, with their abundance of coal, diamonds, and iron ore mines. Their annual mineral production brings them around 125 million USD each year (Ellis). Historically, mining has been an important part of South Africa's economic development and high employment, currently contributing to approximately 8% of their entire population's GDP and employing over 500,000 people (Möncks et al.). With such a large amount of mines, violence has been prevalent in areas such as the "gang-controlled gold mines." This brings important attention to the issue of human rights and the safety of the workplace environment.

Nigeria

Nigeria has multiple oil reserves, owning over 37 billion crude oil barrels (Savannah Energy) and having four major and global oil refineries actively working on site. In 2023, over 91% of export values in Nigeria were generated by mineral fuels and oils, accounting for approximately 60 million USD (Dokua Sasu). At the moment, the population in the mining industry workforce has increased, and there is still an indication of large opportunities in the coming years. However, it still only makes up 0.3% of the country's GDP.

Ghana

Ghana is the biggest gold exporter in all of Africa. In 2019, they had a gold export of 141 982 kg (USGS), around 40,000kg more than second place, South Africa. Their gold export contributed 41% to total export revenue and more than 5% of the country's GDP in 2015. The mining sector plays an important role in Ghana's economy, as more than half the foreign direct investment (FDI) goes

into such, and it generates more than one-third of its total export revenues (International Trade Administration). Their annual mineral production is around 15 million USD (Ellis).

China

China is a highly influential country in Africa's mining industry, as they are the main investor in the continent. Between 2005 and 2015, China's investment in African mining industries multiplied by 2548. The official investment value for 2022, according to official Chinese reports, is 1.8 billion USD (Johns Hopkins University's China Africa Research Initiative). Additionally, China makes up for a large portion of the demand audience in the raw materials and minerals market extracted from Africa. In 2017, Chinese demand for base metals comprised 40% of the global market (Signé). China is heavily involved with monopolies in Africa (a market characterized by a single seller), as they fully control over 8% of all mines in Africa, and this number has seen substantial growth in recent years (Egyin).

Possible Solutions

In order to combat the issue of lack of safety and human rights in the mining industry, the AUP must come up with quick and efficient solutions that can increase the safety of the workplace. Possible solutions include...

Limitations for child labor

A possible solution could involve the establishment of limitations and regulations on decreasing or eliminating child labor. Check-ups could also be imposed to make this reduction or elimination as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Parameters for mining residues

The AUP could focus on creating clear parameters on how trailing, chemical waste, and other residues from mining should be processed to have the least significant footprint on the environment.

Compensation for OHS

Establishing compensation by private organizations (companies) to workers who suffer from OHS. These could be in the form of (but not limited to) compensation money, worker's benefits, or higher working situations.

Laws for living wages

The AUP could work on solutions that revolve around applying regulations and laws to ensure everyone receives a living wage that accurately compensates for their work. This will improve the living conditions of workers outside of the environment and will ensure their well-being and disposition to continue their work.

Increasing security

Increasing security in the mines will reduce crime in the mines and illegal miners. This will increase the safety of the environment, but also the safety of the workers.

Further Reading

Other important nations to the mining industry include Libya, which is high in raw material exports such as clay, cement, and limestone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which is the biggest copper producer in Africa and has high production of cobalt as well, and Botswana, who is the largest diamond exporter country in Africa. Some additional non-African nations that have a strong influence on the mining industry in the continent are Brazil, India, and the USA, which are increasing their investment and interest in the resources and businesses arising in the areas. It is important to note that a large motivation behind the USA's increased interest in investment in African mines is to reduce Africa's dependency on Chinese investment and financial support.

- [Africa's Mining Potential: Trends, Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies](#)
- [AUP: African Mining Vision \(2009\)](#)
- [China's Mining Footprint in Africa](#)
- [ILO: Safety and Health in Mines Convention \(1995\)](#)

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