

South African church leaders plead for mining dispute resolution

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Cape Town, South Africa, 17 September (ENInews)--Two church clerics in South Africa have pleaded for a peaceful end to the mine workers unrest following a warning by the government that illegal protesters would be "dealt with accordingly."

Strikes and labor actions have rocked South Africa's platinum mines, about 100 km northwest of Johannesburg, since 10 August when police fired on strikers at the British-owned Lonmin mine in Marikana and 34 people were killed. An additional 11 people have died in the unrest.

Speaking on 15 September after police and army troops were deployed against strikers, Bishop Jo Seoka, president of the South Africa Council of Churches said, "I am shocked and extremely angry to hear today that the police are out in full force and people have phoned me telling me that workers have been shot at."

Justice Minister Jeff Radebe ordered a crackdown on 14 September saying government would no longer tolerate the violence, threats and intimidation taking place in the mining sector.

The mine protests have spread to six platinum and one gold mine, threatening South Africa's economy. The police confiscated dangerous weapons and blocked peaceful marches by mine workers on 15 September.

Seoka said it seems as if both government and Lonmin misread the situation and now what seemed resolvable might become an untenable situation.

"Government must be crazy believing that what to me resembles an apartheid-era crackdown, can succeed ... such crackdowns in the past led to more resistance," he said.

"I am pleading for high levels of tolerance from both sides," Methodist Bishop Paul Verryn told South African Press Agency on 14 September.

"We have already seen the result of strong willed stances ... I am praying to God that we do not repeat the same mistake," he said.