

**DEBATE ON CONDOLENCE MOTION ON THE LONMIN MINE TRAGEDY**  
**UCDP : HON IS MFUNDISI**  
**TUESDAY, 21 August 2012**

Chairperson,

First and foremost, the United Christian Democratic Party conveys deepest condolences to the families and friends of the 44 people that were killed since the beginning of the Lonmin tragedy. What has happened is indeed tragic. Men had sacrificed and denied themselves to go to work at Lonmin.

Working in a mine has its own risks, but they took up the challenge for themselves and for their families, they understood the risks attached to mining, but surely neither the deceased men nor the families would have thought their end would be brought by the hand of the police, who are supposedly their protectors. This is tragic beyond comprehension.

This of course is no time to be pointing fingers and allocating blame, neither is it a time to be defensive. The nation is mourning. In our African culture, when a person dies, the family appoints a speaker who will relate events leading to the death. The speaker must be painstakingly honest about the events leading to the death. As much as we must not allocate blame, which hardly brings forth anything positive, but we must be painstakingly honest about the events that led to this tragedy. We must be painstakingly honest in addressing those we hold responsible for the killings. The Lonmin tragedies is no natural disaster, there are a number of actions that could have been taken to prevent it, and whoever fell short in dispensing their responsibility leading to this, is responsible for the massacre.

There are many questions to be asked and we hope mooted Judicial Commission of enquiry will ask and find answers to the questions. Similarly there are many observations and innuendos to be made. Relying on news reports, we hear defensive statements that police had no other choice but to shoot as the crowd started shooting first. Two guns were reportedly confiscated from the dead miners. The question is whether trained police officers can ever be justified in killing 35 miners because two amongst them had guns? Surely we can do better than condoning this. There are more efficient ways of controlling crowds through use of better protective equipment, corralling, barbed wire, tear gas and multiple water canons from different vehicles.

We cannot accept that the police had no other option but to shoot live ammunition on protesters. The real reason that the police returned fire is because of the culture of violence in South Africa that is exacerbated by the police attitude of protecting themselves before trying to protect civilians. This is a result of many things including the calls to 'shoot to kill' by the former police commissioner. It is in this light that we hold the Minister of Police responsible. His police force is ill equipped to deal with crowd control yet we have seen many protests turning violent in South Africa. If shooting live ammunition to protesters is how they are trained to handle these situations, then we shall see more massacres at the hands of the police. South Africans are still battling to come to terms with the Andries Tatane issue and now this.

If South Africa were the democracy it is said to be the minister of police would have resigned last week. In real democracies if officials fail the minister resigns.

This we saw in Great Britain, in 2002, when Estelle Morris, Secretary of Education and Skills resigned because of severe problems and inaccuracies in the marking of A-level examinations. Very recently in 2009 we saw former minister Blunkett resign because officials in his Home Affairs department issued a work permit to an undeserving individual.

We make this call because of individual ministerial responsibility incumbent to ministers of state. Our constitution in Section 92 (2) states clearly that members of cabinet are accountable collectively and individually to parliament for the exercise of their powers and the performance of their functions

Certainly, the miners are not innocent in this tragedy. The UCDP believes that the miners had every right to protest against the meager incomes they receive. Four thousand rands a month is an insult compared to the hard conditions that they must work under. However, what right did they have to carry weapons, traditional or otherwise while striking? Obviously, when they put tools down the mine loses revenue, enough action to make mine management think and negotiate the grievances.

Against whom did they intend using the weapons they carried? What gives striking workers a right to undermine the rule of law? This has been ongoing for a while but the ruling party turns a blind eye to it

because they are nursing tripartite relations more than they nurse constitutional obligations and the rule of law.

This tragedy could have been avoided if we had decisive leadership that sets norms on what is acceptable and unacceptable during strikes. This tragedy is a symptom of the general failure of leadership in the tripartite alliance which has been building over the years and is starting to bear its fruits. We hold the Unions and the ruling party responsible for lack of leadership.

I am not a fan of the SAC but on the question of indecisiveness by leadership in government we in the UCDP cannot agree more with their North West Secretary when he said:

“As the SACP we want to state categorically that it should not have been allowed until when death rises for law enforcement agencies and the nation’s leadership to take action”.

We regret the loss of lives and hope all parties have had their lesson from this unfortunate situation. Our hearts go out to the families of the deceased, their next of kin and the communities they hailed from.

We plead that let us all march forward in unison as we observe the period of mourning as announced by the President of the Republic.