

Longstanding conflict in Burkina Faso far from over

25 November, 2015 110 agency workers at Nord Gold Bissa mine in Burkina Faso have been fired following a conflict with the agency employer Exterhum Africa, which has been going on for more than six months.

Contract workers at Nord Gold Bissa mine in Burkina Faso are in conflict with Exterhum Africa, who has consistently refused to listen to the workers' demands.

Nord Gold has two operations in Burkina Faso, at Sabcé (Bissa Gold SA) and at Taparco (SOMITA SA). A staggering 80 per cent of the workforce is on a contract basis, with fixed term contracts renewable without limitation.

In April, workers presented the management of Bissa Gold SA with a number of demands, including increasing the number of hours related to the role of union representatives from two to 15 hours per month, the right to use cell phones on site during break time and lunch hour, shortening shifts from 12 to eight hours according to the labour law, paid overtime as well as when working on holidays.

With the demands unheard, workers handed management a letter in October, informing of a planned strike if their demands were not met. When there was still no response, around 700 workers coming off their shift organized a sit-in.

Management responded by denying almost 400 workers who had just begun their shift access to food, water and the toilets. Interventions from the union, the National Union of Mine and Quarry Workers (SNTMCB), the central union organization, the National Confederation of Workers of Burkina Faso (CNTB) and local community leaders, were to no avail.

When the sit-in ended four days later, management continued to intimidate workers by firing 110 of them by letter. Another group of workers was denied access to the site, and all workers involved in the strike saw their bank accounts frozen by the employer.

IndustriALL Global Union and CNTB has called for government intervention to avoid further deterioration of the situation.

"The actions of both Exterhum and Nord Gold Bissa are in direct violation of the ILO conventions on freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively.

"Rumours are rife and people are scared of being the next ones on the list. This conflict must end now and our workers must get their jobs back without any retaliation from the employer," says Augustin Blaise Hien, general secretary of CNTB.

Jyrki Raina, general secretary of IndustriALL, says:

Precarious work is a threat to all workers. Both the real employer, Nord Gold, and the agency, Exterhum Africa, must take responsibility and immediately enter into dialogue with the union to solve this conflict.