



Deadly clashes continue at African Barrick gold mine

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Police have killed more villagers in clashes at a controversial Tanzanian gold mine owned by a Barrick Gold Corp. subsidiary, despite the company's pledges to reduce the violence, researchers say.

The researchers, including a law firm and two civil society groups, say they've received reports that as many as 10 people have been killed this year as a result of "excessive force" by police and security guards at the North Mara mine, owned by African Barrick Gold, a subsidiary of Toronto-based Barrick.

A spokesman for African Barrick confirmed to The Globe and Mail that "fatalities" have occurred in clashes at the mine site this year, but declined to estimate how many. It is up to the Tanzanian police to release the information, he said.

Tanzanian police have repeatedly refused to give any details on fatalities at the site. Dozens of villagers have been killed by police at the mine in the past several years, according to frequent reports from civil society groups. The company occasionally confirms some of the deaths, including a clash in which police killed five people in 2011.

The deadly clashes occur when villagers walk into the mine site in search of waste rock, from which small bits of gold can be extracted. Hundreds or even thousands of "intruders," as they are known locally, can be involved.

Barrick has signed agreements with the Tanzanian police to help provide security at the site. But villagers say the police routinely accept bribes in exchange for access to the site - and then sometimes shoot villagers in disputes over access. Police, too, have been injured by villagers throwing stones or wielding crude tools.

In 2011, African Barrick announced a series of steps to reduce the violence. It allocated \$14-million for the construction of a three-metre-high concrete wall for 14 kilometres around the mine site. It hired a consulting company to instruct the Tanzanian police on "international standards" of human rights. And it announced a series of community projects to improve relations with the seven villages surrounding the gold mine, with more than \$15-million in company funding.

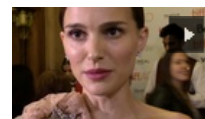
African Barrick says it managed to reduce the number of "intruders" at the site by 35 per cent in 2013, after five consecutive years of increasing numbers. But it declined to say whether fatalities have increased or decreased this year, or even whether it is able to keep track of those deaths.

The company also acknowledged that it had provided compensation

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“packages” to more than 60 villagers who have complained of violence by police or security guards at the North Mara site.

Leigh Day, a London-based law firm that represents many villagers who allege that they or their family members were victims of police shootings at North Mara, says at least 10 villagers were killed at the mine site this year, many of them as a result of police shootings. It provided the dates of each of the alleged fatalities, and the names of several of the victims.

African Barrick said “a number” of these deaths “correspond with incidents reported to the mine.” But it said some of the deaths may have resulted from fights among the intruders, or accidental falls in the mining pit.

Two civil society groups, Ottawa-based MiningWatch Canada and a British group known as Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID), visited the mine site and surrounding villages in June and July, including hospitals and clinics around the site. They said they interviewed a doctor who had counted 10 deaths as a result of police gunshots at the site in a two-month period.

The groups also alleged that African Barrick’s staff have obtained the medical records of victims of police shootings and routinely question and photograph injured people as they await treatment. Asked about this allegation, the company did not comment.

“We are deeply concerned not only about the clear patterns we discern in the excessive use of force at the mine, but also about the intimidation, persecution, and invasion of privacy suffered by victims and their families in the aftermath of violence by mine security,” said Patricia Feeney of RAID.

African Barrick disputes the fatality toll cited by the two groups. But in many cases, victims are taken to clinics far from the mine, to avoid the police, so their deaths might be unknown to the company, the groups say.

A British all-party parliamentary group is also investigating the police shootings at North Mara, since African Barrick is headquartered in London.

The company acknowledged that one villager was killed by police in a clash in January, but did not give details of other deaths. It said the clashes were caused by “illegal, armed and violent intruders” who “systematically” steal gold-bearing rocks and other property.

The Tanzanian police are required to receive human rights training before they are assigned to any of African Barrick’s mine sites, the company said.

“It is only in very rare cases and extreme circumstances and when all alternatives have been exhausted that the police intervene in confrontation with intruders,” a company statement said. “We regret any loss of life at the mine and continually strive to improve relations with local community members to reduce instances of trespass.”

In addition to the shootings, the police have also been accused of sexual assault. Last December, African Barrick revealed that it gave cash payments and other compensation to 14 women who were sexually assaulted by police and security guards at the mine site.


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