

South Africans rally to mark Marikana massacre 10th anniversary

By Aljazeera

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Thousands of people gathered in the South African town of Marikana to mark a decade since dozens of striking workers were killed in the worst act of police violence since the end of apartheid. On August 16, 2012, 34 people were killed and 78 injured when police opened fire on platinum mine workers who had gathered on a hill near the mine to press demands for better wages and housing. Ten years later, survivors and relatives of victims are still demanding justice.

“10 Years of Betrayal,” said T-shirts worn by many at the commemoration on Tuesday, expressing bitterness that those killed have not received justice and that promises of better pay and conditions for the miners have not been fulfilled.

Clustered on a small hilltop around 100 kilometres (60 miles) northwest of Johannesburg, where the shootings took place, the miners sang mournful songs and chants. Many at the event wore green and black, the colours of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union that led the strike. Opposition officials also attended the event.

“We are still waiting to know the person who sent the police to kill our husbands,” a representative for the widows of those killed who did not give her name told the crowd from a stage, the words “No justice, no arrest” appearing on a banner behind her.

Videos of police opening fire on the miners shocked South Africa and were broadcast around the world, sparking outrage and leading to a commission of inquiry to investigate the police actions.

An official inquiry placed much of the blame for the deaths on police tactics, finding that an operation to remove the miners should not have gone ahead. It cleared senior government officials of any culpability. President Cyril Ramaphosa, who at the time was non-executive director at Lonmin, which operated the mine, was also exonerated. No one has been charged over the massacre.

“We want justice. Now, not tomorrow,” Joseph Mathunjwa, the leader of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) told the rally.

‘The truth will come out’

The Independent Police Investigative Directorate, a police watchdog, said the incident is still under investigation.

“They must apologise,” said Dali Mpfu, a lawyer representing the victims, calling for the creation of a memorial to those who lost their lives.

Authorities have said they are still finalising dozens of compensation claims, having already paid almost 76 million rand (\$4.6m) to the victims’ families.

“We need to be strong men, in the end, the truth will come out, even when we are no longer there, as to who was responsible for the spilling of blood in Marikana,” said Mzoxolo Magidiwana, a survivor of the massacre who escaped with nine gunshot wounds.

No government representatives attended the event.

In a statement, Minister in the Presidency Mondli Gungubele, said, “The Marikana tragedy was a turning point in the history of democratic South Africa and one that must never be repeated.”

Wages in the mining sector have increased by 86.5 percent since 2012, the Minerals Council South Africa, an industry group, said in a statement.

A survivor of the shooting, Mzoxolo Magidiwana, 34, said he feels let down as the living conditions in Marikana have not improved in the decade since the killings.

“I regard this [August 16] as the day I survived death when it was staring at me. Many of the people that I was with on that day, their lives ended in this place,” Magidiwana told The Associated Press news agency.

“To survive nine bullets, I still wonder how God saved me when people were trying to kill me,” said Magidiwana. “It is a day that I respect very much. Every year, I literally get shivers because I know that I was not supposed to be here. I have not seen yet why God saved me but I know there is a reason he spared my life.”

Magidiwana said that he is disappointed that despite the strike, the lives of the miners and their families have not improved.

“Everybody can see that nothing much has changed in this place. People still live in the same conditions as before,” he said. “Even at the koppie [the hill where the shootings occurred], there was supposed to be a monument, an official remembrance similar to others that are done for significant events in this country, but there is nothing.”

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