

31st October 2024

Duncan Wanblad
Chief executive Anglo American
17 Charterhouse Street London
EC1N 6RA

Dear Mr Wanblad,

We, the undersigned, write to urge you to take immediate action to address – through compensation, environmental remediation and the funding of a robust blood lead screening programme – the severe health impacts on children and pregnant women caused by Anglo American's former lead mine in Kabwe, Zambia.

Today, people in Kabwe live in one of the most polluted places in the world, substantially because of the continuing legacy of massive environmental lead emissions during Anglo American's operation of the Kabwe mine and its flagrant disregard for the health and safety of Kabwe's residents.

The Kabwe mine was part of the Anglo American group for almost 50 years, between 1925 and 1974, during its most productive years. Evidence shows that Anglo American was aware at least from the early 1970s of widespread lead poisoning of local children and the environment- this evidence having been repeatedly reported by Mine doctors and international experts commissioned by Anglo American.

Tens of thousands of children in Kabwe have sustained lead poisoning including serious and lifelong neurological and cognitive impairment. As you are well aware, without any other legal recourse, a class action lawsuit has been filed in South Africa on behalf of an estimated 140,000 women and children in Kabwe who allege lead poisoning caused by Anglo American South Africa, the former Head Office Company of the Anglo American Group. The Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa will decide early next year whether or not the class action may proceed.

Living up to your own principles

Anglo American has expressly endorsed the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights, which includes the right to a remedy (Access to Justice). Your own Group Human Rights policy states: "Where we have caused or contributed to adverse human rights impacts we will contribute to their remediation as appropriate." A number of UN Agencies

and international NGOs have made formal representations to the South African court on the contradiction between Anglo American's publicly stated Human Rights commitments and its opposition to the class action, which provides the Kabwe claimants' only realistic means of access to a remedy.

It is too late for remediation for many of the children affected since you took over the mine almost 100 years ago. But there is still time to deliver on that promise for children in Kabwe today.

As the chief executive of Anglo American, you have an opportunity to enact meaningful change for the future of Kabwe's children and make good on your stated values of 'care and respect', 'integrity' and 'accountability'.

We collectively urge you and Anglo American to commit to:

- Taking immediate steps to compensate the people of Kabwe for the harm caused to them by Anglo American's historic legacy;
- Setting up and funding a blood lead screening programme to protect future generations; and
- Funding the remediation of land and water contaminated by lead.

Signed:

Organisations

ACTSA (Action for Southern Africa)
ACTSA Scotland (Action for Southern Africa)
African Coalition for Corporate Accountability (ACCA)
CAN Africa (Climate Action Network Africa)
Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO)
Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
Christian Aid
Client Earth
Corporate European Observatory (CEO)
Corporate Justice Coalition
Environment Africa
European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
Friends of the Earth Africa
General Federation Trade Unions (GFTU)
Global Justice Now
GreenFaith Africa
Health Poverty Action
International Corporate Accountability Roundtable
ITUC Africa (International Trade Union Confederation Africa)

London Mining Network
RAID
Responsible Sourcing Network
Save the Children Zambia
Stamp Out Poverty
Transnational Institute

Individuals

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb
Cameron Boyle, Global Action for Health
Lee Crawford, Centre for Global Development
Lord Dholakia OBE DL
Lord Jonny Oates
Lord Paul Boateng (President Africa APPG)
Lord Peter Hain
Peter Burdin
Rt Revd Dr Rosemarie Mallett, Bishop of Croydon
Suresh Kamath, Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee

Appendix

A long history of known lead poisoning

In 1969, a doctor at the mine Dr Lawrence immediately realised there was a problem with the health of local children. Having drawn blood from 500 of them, he reported to the mine's Chief Medical Officer that he had found extremely high blood lead levels ("BLLs") enough to cause serious brain damage and death.

Records show the company commissioned a report by a world-renowned industrial health expert Professor Ronald Lane from the UK's University of Manchester in 1970 to investigate the veracity of Dr Lawrence's claims. His report recommended removal and replacement of the topsoil and relocation of significant sections of the community from areas close to the mine. However, the mine General Manager at the time rebuffed the proposal, saying that it "would be far too expensive". In the end, Anglo only relocated an estimated 3000 of its workers and their families, leaving behind more than 8000 workers and their families in the most contaminated areas.

In 1972 another mine doctor, Dr Nicklin, wrote a letter to the British Medical Journal noting his alarm at the deaths of five children living close to the Kabwe smelter from high blood lead levels.

Between 1971 and 1974, prompted by the deaths of eight Kabwe children from suspected lead poisoning, Dr A.R.L Clark from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

initiated an investigation into lead-related risks facing the communities surrounding the Kabwe Mine. Clark surveyed the BLLs of children and found these to be significantly elevated across three communities close to the mine and concluded that this was directly attributable to emissions from the mine smelter and waste dumps.

Despite this shocking evidence, in 1974 Anglo American transferred the mine to ZCCM, a Zambian State-owned company, without carrying out the recommended remedial actions.

The threshold of BLLs that the WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommend for public health action and monitoring to take place is 3.5 ug/dL. Young children are particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning, according to the WHO, because they absorb 4-5 times as much ingested lead as adults from a given source. Studies in 2015, 2018 and 2020 have confirmed the serious and continuing nature of lead poisoning in Kabwe.

The irreversible impacts of lead poisoning

As you know, there is no safe level of lead poisoning. According to the WHO, "even at low levels, it can cause serious and often irreversible permanent damage to organs and the neurological system and is now known to produce a spectrum of injury across multiple body systems. In particular, it can affect children's brain development, resulting in reduced IQ, behavioural changes such as reduced attention span and increased antisocial behaviour, and reduced educational attainment. At high levels of exposure to lead the brain and central nervous system can be severely damaged causing coma, convulsions and even death."

Lead also affects women's fertility later in life. Ingested lead is absorbed into children's bones and may be released during future pregnancies, affecting the health of the foetus in the womb and creating a higher risk of pre-eclampsia, gestational hypertension and pregnancy loss.

While it is true that these guidelines were less stringent in 1974 when the Kabwe mine was within the Anglo American Group, as outlined above, Anglo American was well aware by 1974 of extremely high BLLs among young children and of several lead poisoning deaths of children. This state of affairs would never have been acceptable, morally or legally at any time.

The current position in Kabwe

A 2015 study by Professor John Yabe et al. found that of the children sampled in the township of Kasanda, Kabwe, over half had BLLs that were 18 times the current CDC threshold. Kabwe has now been described as the world's most toxic town and has one of the highest incidences of childhood lead poisoning in the world. According to reports by expert statisticians, the class action is estimated to include around 140,000 children and women in and around Kabwe who have been poisoned by lead. Medical reports on the 13 representative claimants, indicate that some were found to have BLLs that exceeded 100g/dL.

A later (2018) study by Professor Stephan Bose-O'Reilly et al, which re-analysed the health data from three existing studies confirmed that there was "a severe environmental health crisis in Kabwe which warrants immediate attention."