

Monday, Lusaka (3rd March, 2025)



CEJ URGES JUSTICE AFTER TAILINGS DAM COLLAPSE ON THE COPPERBELT

Centre for Environment Justice (CEJ) has urged stakeholders to rally for justice after the devastating tailings dam collapse on the Copperbelt.

On February 18, 2025, tragedy struck when Tailings Dam 15F at Sino Metals Leach Zambia Limited collapsed, releasing over 50 million litres of highly acidic leach residue into the Mwambashi and Kafue rivers.

This disaster has caused unprecedented contamination, with pH levels between 1.8 and 3.5, endangering human lives, aquatic ecosystems, and livestock that depend on these water sources.

CEJ Executive Director Ms Maggie Mapalo Mwape said what was once a lifeline for thousands of people has now turned into a ticking time bomb, threatening public health, food security, and biodiversity.

Ms Mwape said the dead fish float on the riverbanks, livestock are falling ill, and communities are left without access to safe drinking water.

She said the damage is immeasurable, but the response must not be delayed.

Ms Mwape commended the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment, Ministry of Water Development, Ministry of Mines and Mineral Development, and Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries for their prompt response.

She, however, emphasized that this crisis demands more than just emergency interventions but requires a long-term, justice-driven approach to hold polluters accountable and ensure affected communities receive the support they urgently need.

Ms Mwape called on the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) under the Office of the Vice President to immediately take the lead in conducting a full-scale environmental, social, economic, and health impact assessment to determine the short- and long-term consequences of the spill.

She urged for the implementation of an emergency response plan, including safe water distribution, medical support for affected communities, and alternative sources of food and income.

Ms Mwape also called for the establishment of a transparent compensation framework for families who have lost their livelihoods due to this disaster.

She further emphasized the need for enforcing strict penalties and environmental reparations against Sino Metals Leach Zambia Limited for their negligence and failure to prevent this catastrophe, and for strengthening mining regulations and enforcement mechanisms to prevent such disasters from occurring again in the future.

Ms Mwape highlighted that the DMMU should now coordinate and consolidate efforts from all sector ministries that are affected by this calamity.

She stressed that this is not just an environmental disaster; it is a human rights crisis.

"The right to clean water, food, and a healthy environment is non-negotiable.

She stated that this disaster was not an accident but the direct result of poor environmental management, weak regulatory oversight, and corporate negligence.

For too long, multinational mining companies have operated without accountability, prioritizing profits over people and exploiting Zambia's natural resources while leaving behind pollution and destruction," she said.

Ms Mwape posed questions about the whereabouts of safety checks, why the disaster was not foreseen and prevented, and why communities should bear the cost of corporate recklessness.

She asserted that it is time to demand answers and that Sino Metals must be held legally and financially responsible for the damage caused.

"The government must ensure strict enforcement of environmental laws, and those responsible must face the full force of justice," she said.

Ms Mwape called for standing together for justice and environmental protection, emphasizing that this catastrophe should not fade into silence.

She urged the Zambian government to implement stronger environmental laws, enforce accountability, and ensure proper compensation for affected communities.

Ms Mwape also called on the international community and environmental organizations to provide expertise, financial support, and advocacy to restore the contaminated rivers and ecosystems.

She encouraged civil society, community leaders, and concerned citizens to raise their voices, mobilize for justice, and hold corporations accountable for their actions.

Ms Mwape stated that this is about more than just one disaster—it is about the future of our rivers, our health, and our dignity as a nation.

"We will not stand by as our environment is destroyed, our communities poisoned, and our rights violated. Together, we demand justice. Together, we fight for a cleaner, safer Zambia," she said.

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