

Swedish companies do not adhere to international standards

According to a report released by the Bench Marks Foundation, Swedish multinational enterprises with ties to the platinum industry in South Africa, do not adhere to international standards on identifying adverse human rights risks and disclosing information on how these risks are addressed.



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The report, 'Problematic Platinum - The responsibility of Swedish Companies in South Africa', was released to communities within the platinum district near Rustenburg in the North West Province on 10 April by the Bench Marks Foundation on behalf of Swedwatch, a religiously and politically independent organisation that examines Swedish companies' business operations abroad.

Human rights risks

The report focused on the Scania, Volvo, Atlas Copco and Sandvik companies and their responsibility - according to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights of 2011 - to respect and disclose risks in human rights in their entire value chain, whether or not it concerns suppliers or customers.

The companies are all either buyers or suppliers to the platinum industry in South Africa. The international standard also states that companies need to communicate how human rights and environmental risks are addressed and mitigated. The report shows that the companies fail to communicate their risk management externally citing commercial confidentiality as the reason not to do so.

In addition, the companies should be communicating due diligence and its risk management in a way which enables stakeholders, especially those affected by the business' operations, to evaluate whether or not all these risks have been handled correctly. To date, no such communication has been forthcoming.

Inadequate housing

Authored by Swedwatch, the report was backed by The Church of Sweden and the Africa Groups of Sweden which also participated in developing recommendations. The Bench Marks Foundation consulted and facilitated the field research for the report.

The report shows that communities in the vicinity of the mines lack adequate housing and to a large extent access to water and sanitation. The mine workers are exposed to hazardous working conditions and their wage levels are not sufficient to support them and their families.

It also makes a comment that states have a duty to protect human rights, but companies have a responsibility, regardless of their position, to respect human rights and to be transparent in its communication.

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