**The People´s Health Movement of South Africa condemns the Lonmin Massacre!**

The brutal massacre of at least 34 Lonmim Mine workers, who were mowed down by automatic rifle fire from the South African police at Marikana in the North West province, has sent shock waves throughout South Africa and the world. The backdrop to this tragedy is the terrible working conditions in the mining industry and the desperate poverty and inequality that continues to plague South African society.

When 3000 workers went on a strike at Lonmin mine, the country watched in horror as the situation rapidly spiralled out of control. While union rivalry is placed at the forefront of this conflict, we must not forget that this was primarily a wage dispute with Lonmin Mine management. The failure of management to deal with this crisis effectively, and specifically their refusal to meet with the workers, must be condemned.

When union leaders failed in their attempts to persuade workers to come down from the hill they had congregated on, it was management the workers demanded to see. Even on the final day, before the massacre took place, Lonmin management ignored this call.

Although the real facts behind the rivalry between the two unions (NUM and AMCU) may never be known, it is clear that the hostile attitude of traditional unions towards new or independent unions contributed to this crisis. The principle of worker solidarity is nowhere to be seen in this conflict, a disheartening symptom of the failure of leadership in the union movement.

While this complex and volatile situation required insightful negotiation; instead of political leadership intervening as they should have; instead of Lonmin management speaking directly to workers as they should have; the police angered by the prior deaths of two of their colleagues and alarmingly armed with automatic assault rifles, were brought into this volatile situation and moreover instructed to restore law and order at all costs! Workers fleeing teargas moved towards the police who without employing any other means of crowd control, unleashed a hail of bullets on them, and when the dust settled, dozens of workers lay dead, more lay injured and another South African day of mourning had been created. No police contingent should ever enter a civilian situation with such deadly weapons. We also note with concern the lack of visible emergency workers who should have been present in a situation where a violent outcome was possible. In their absence we question the quality of immediate care given to those injured.

This tragedy is symbolic of the brutality of a society where it is considered normal for mine workers to live in corrugated iron shacks without running water or electricity, where abject poverty coexists with the obscene wealth of those sitting on the boards of mining companies, where the basic dignity of our people is undermined every day and where a group of workers can become so desperate that they are prepared to risk their lives to settle a wage dispute.

As PHM we extend our sympathy to the workers who have died and the many more who were injured, also to their families and their comrades at Lonmin mine. We condemn the violence of the police and call for action to be taken against those who were in charge of this operation. In addition to the enquiry into the massacre which the president has announced, we call for a reaction to this tragedy that addresses the root causes in the form of a people driven National Enquiry into the Mining Sector, investigating the living conditions of workers, the ongoing migrant labour system and the general conditions of work within the industry.