

20 October 2016

IndustriALL Global Union protest letter to BHP Billiton's shareholders

[To be read out, on behalf of IndustriALL Global Union, by a member of the London Mining Network at the demonstration during the BHP Billiton's shareholders' meeting in London on 20 October 2016.]

As the new General Secretary of IndustriALL Global Union, which represents more than 50 million workers in mining, energy and manufacturing industries in 140 countries, I wish to convey to you my warmest solidarity greetings and support to the London Mining Network's coordinated demonstration in the context of the BHP Billiton annual shareholders' meeting.

In particular, IndustriALL Global Union expresses its full support of the victims, both workers and residents, of the Samarco mining dam disaster in Mariana, Brazil on 5 November 2015. This environmental disaster was the result of the collapse of a huge tailings dam at the Samarco Mineração S.A, which is a mine jointly owned by BHP Billiton and the Brazilian company, Vale.

Therefore, it cannot be business as usual at this shareholder's meeting, the first one since the Samarco disaster. The iron ore tailings dam, under BHP Billiton's care, maintenance and responsibility collapsed, releasing a toxic wave, which flooded the valley, killing 19 people while injuring others, with an estimated 500 people having been displaced from their homes.

It cannot be business as usual when the sludge and mining residues from the dam reached the River Doce, a source of drinking water in the south east of Brazil. As a result, municipal authorities had to ban the use of river water for human consumption. The contaminated water even reached the Atlantic Ocean.

A separate police investigation has accused Samarco Mineração S.A of wilful misconduct, stating that the company ignored clear signs that the dam was at risk of collapsing. There are also claims that seek to corroborate the police report that Samarco Mineração S.A had been warned about the possibility of the dam collapsing. We demand a full and impartial investigation of this environmental disaster.

IndustriALL Global Union finds it unacceptable that BHP Billiton has sought to buy its way out of this tragedy, which should not have happened in the first place, by taking charge of only \$1.3 billion, a far lower sum than the \$8 billion public civil claim instituted by the Brazilian authorities.

It is important to add that several delegates at IndustriALL's 2nd Congress, which took place in Rio de Janeiro from 4 to 7 October 2016, referred to BHP Billiton as a bad example of company behavior.

As the 5 November anniversary of the disaster approaches, IndustriALL Global Union is preparing to commemorate this tragic event, the worst ever environmental disaster in Brazil's history. Trade unions, and environmental and human rights organizations will express their full solidarity with those affected, one year on, demanding that all necessary steps be taken to ensure that such an accident never occurs again; that those found responsible be punished to the full extent of the law; and that the River Doce be brought back to its original state.

In solidarity,



Valter Sanches
General Secretary
IndustriALL Global Union