

## **WIEGO Strongly Condemns Violent Assault of Reclaimers Near Genesis Landfill**

**Johannesburg, Gauteng June 21, 2018** - On June 20<sup>th</sup>, at least 70 reclaimers were violently attacked in a raid by the Red Ants, a private security company specialising in evictions. The attack took place next to the Genesis Landfill located near the center of Johannesburg and operated by the multinational company, Averda. Reclaimers' homes were raided and workers were violently attacked. Witnesses reported that reclaimers' valuables (including phones and money) were stolen, passports were destroyed and workers were fired upon with rubber bullets by the South African private security company. At least 15 people were admitted to the South Rand Hospital for injuries, including 4 people who were later transferred to the Johannesburg General Hospital with serious injuries.

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research indicates at least 90,000 reclaimers in South Africa collect, sort, and sell recyclable waste to make a living. The victims of this attack have worked and lived near the Genesis landfill for 17 years, with at least 20 families living in a small temporary settlement behind the landfill, near the railway. Reclaimers had traditionally been permitted to work during the landfill's hours of operation. However, in September 2016, when the Dubai-based multinational company Averda assumed ownership and operation of the landfill, they began refusing reclaimers entry.

In a context of staggering unemployment (2018 estimates indicate the South African [unemployment rate is 26.7%](#)), reclaiming recyclable waste provides a crucial source of income for South Africa's poorest and most vulnerable workers. For this reason, reclaimers were forced to resort to entering the landfill site after hours, often working in the dark until the early morning hours. They then transported recyclables to their settlement behind the landfill for further sorting.

In recent months, attempts by reclaimers to open up discussions with Averda management in order to regain access to the landfill have been unsuccessful. And now, their livelihoods are under further threat: Averda served an interdict earlier this month to evict reclaimers from the landfill. With the help of the Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI), the interdict has been postponed and the case is to be heard on July 16<sup>th</sup>. The June 20<sup>th</sup> attack on reclaimers by the Red Ants defied the court decision to postpone the interdict, and, by invading reclaimers' homes (on land not owned by Averda), the Red Ants went beyond the jurisdiction of the eviction order.

### *Joburg Violence is not an Isolated Incident*

A [recent publication](#) by WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) acknowledges that reclaimers - especially those working on landfills - are vulnerable to evictions, physical abuse, harassment, beatings and other forms of violence.

In fact, the violence and attempted eviction of reclaimers near the Genesis landfill is not an isolated incident. In January 2018, several reclaimers were assaulted at the Genesis landfill. In May 2018, the reclaimer community of Mushroomville (along West Avenue in Centurion) was rendered destitute after a swift court decision ruled in favour of a private property owner's

motion to prohibit close to 150 people from using the land they had worked and lived on for years. Reclaimers in Woodmead, Midrand, Village Main Station, Fox and End Street and Mai Mai have also reported being threatened with evictions.

#### *Workers Want Recognition as Workers & Access to Waste*

WIEGO strongly condemns acts of violence against reclaimers and the associated threats of eviction. Reclaimers are calling for:

- Their right to work to be recognized by the South African government.
- An end to forced evictions, thefts, violence and harassment of reclaimers by the Red Ants. Where evictions must take place, the local government must provide an alternative and mutually agreed upon space in a good location before the eviction takes place;
- Compensation for the public service that reclaimers provide;
- Supply of publicly owned facilities which allow reclaimers the infrastructure needed to work more effectively (for example, scales, bailing machines, vehicles to use for collection, etc); and
- Provision of sorting and safe storage facilities close to reclaimers' collection routes.

WIEGO calls on organised workers in South Africa and internationally, to stand in solidarity against the multinational Averda's employment of brute force against the Genesis landfill reclaimers. In particular, WIEGO will be appealing to its ally the Public Services International (PSI), which has for years been challenging the role of private companies such as Averda which take over the cleaning and waste functions of municipalities through privatisation.

**About WIEGO:** WIEGO is a global network focused on securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO works with reclaimers in Johannesburg to support their organising efforts. The work in Johannesburg is part of a larger project including reclaimers in Sasolburg and Pretoria. The focus of the project is to advance the integration of reclaimers into the solid waste collection and disposal system.

Website: [www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org). Twitter: [@WIEGOglobal](https://twitter.com/WIEGOglobal).

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For more information, or to set-up an interview, please contact WIEGO members in Johannesburg:

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