

With sorrow and tears

Marikana miners remembered

On 16 August 2014 commemorative activities took place at Wonderkop, Marikana – the site where 34 miners were shot dead by the police exactly two years ago. It was a sombre event of sorrow, tears, poetry, music, and fiery political statements as those present remembered the tragic event that left a permanent scar in their lives, writes **Elijah Chiwota**.

The commemoration programme started with a roll call of the deceased – the 10 killed the week prior to the Marikana Massacre – and the 34 shot dead by police on 16 August 2012. As the names were called out the widows – mostly young women – stood up holding red candles that symbolised the blood of the slain workers. Men and women fought back tears when they recollected what happened on that day.

The master of ceremonies, Advocate Dali Mpofu, representing the families of the miners at the Marikana Commission, pointed at the koppies as he described where the miners were shot.

Anger was displayed at Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa's involvement in events leading to the massacre. He had 'blood on his hands' said one poet and the audience, made up mainly of mineworkers and the local community, shouted back in a chorus. A young poet couldn't finish her recital as she got emotional. Tears muffled her voice. 'They must protect us from gangsters but they are the gangsters' sang one rapper.

As the proceedings were taking place campaigners distributed posters demanding the withdrawal

of all charges against the miners who were arrested and charged after the massacre.

WHERE ALLIANCE FEARS TO TREAD

If one takes into account the speakers' line up it was clear that there was no one from the ruling African National Congress or other Alliance partners save for the distribution of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa posters. The commemorations were therefore a space for opposition parties and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu).

Economic Freedom Fighters popular leader, Julius Malema, promised to build houses for the widows.

Other politicians who took to the stage included the Democratic Alliance's Mmusi Maimane and Congress of the People's Mosiuoa Lekota as well as other parties like the United Democratic Movement and the Workers and Socialist Party.

The Democratic Left Front's Trevor Ngwane called for the formation of a Workers Party.

The extremely popular Amcu president, Joseph Mathunjwa, also took to the stage after several songs and an *imbongi* (praise poet) had done their share in praising his

leadership. He came to the stage just before the observing of a moment's silence at 3:53pm – the time when the first shots were fired during the massacre.

Mathunjwa promised R12,500 to each widow, and also mentioned that Amcu had opened a strike fund with an initial deposit of R2-million. A trust fund had also been set up to help the families of the dead miners.

Said Mathunjwa: 'You have broken the chains of slave salaries in platinum. A few workers are earning less than R7,500. This comes from your bravery, the blood and spirit [of the dead miners] and God'. He warned mining companies against closing shafts saying Amcu 'will fight fire with fire' and that it will also be an opportunity for workers to own the mines. If that were to happen the platinum would not be exported before beneficiation.

Families of the dead miners also wanted compensation from government to be speeded up because they were struggling to make ends meet now that they had no breadwinners.

Bishops, led by Jo Seoka of the Anglican Church prayed for healing for the bereaved families and called upon Lonmin to honour its promise of erecting a tombstone at the site in honour of the miners. **LB**