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Mining TRC seen as a first step

● Talk about pain before we reach a common vision, says Froneman

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The establishment of a process such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which marked the end of apartheid and the start of reconciliation, is needed to build trust in the fractured mining industry, says Neal Froneman, CEO of Sibanye Gold and vice-president of the Chamber of Mines.

Cautious in not being too prescriptive about the process and how it would work, Froneman said the establishment of "TRC Two" would clear much of the bad blood and distrust that marked engagements between the companies, unions and the government on charting a sustainable and inclusive future for the industry at a particularly difficult time.

There is a growing acknowledgment in the corporate sector of the mining industry that a lot of hurt was caused by apartheid policies aimed at providing cheap and plentiful labour to the mines in the last century.

"We don't have all the answers and we are trying to understand the process and what will be required. Without fail, every chamber member understands the debilitating trust deficit that exists and we are debating how best to resolve it," Froneman said last week.

"I believe a lot of the punitive regulations we are dealing with, the way they are implemented, the labour issues and antagonistic environment we have, are because of this trust deficit and a perception that the industry continues to abuse people," said the CEO of SA's largest domestic gold producer.

One of the levers the Department of Mineral Resources is seen to use to the detriment of mining companies is the ability to close entire mines for safety violations, despite a fall in the number of fatalities on mines.

Graphic: RUBY-GAY MARTIN Source: IRESS

R13.6bn cost to the industry by recent increase in safety stoppages which a number of CEOs have publicly aired their concerns about

A number of CEOs have aired their concerns about the recent increase in safety stoppages, which in 2012-15 cost the industry R13.6bn in lost revenue.

"We envisage a process like the TRC – a TRC Two. We need to talk of the things that cause so much pain and we have to sincerely commit to not letting them happen again," he said, arguing the companies involved would not be opening themselves up for a legal liability, referring to the silicosis legal processes started by workers whose lungs were irreparably damaged working underground at gold mines.

"There is no other way for us all to align behind a new, common vision and without it we will not have a sustainable industry," Froneman said.

The chamber had received informal feedback from "very senior" people in the governing ANC that this was a process it would be willing to work together on with mining companies and unions.

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