

■ PETROCHEMICALS

Civil society turns up the heat on Sasol

Activists tell fuel giant to address concerns over unchecked pollution as well as fatalities in SA and Mozambique

DINEO FAKU
dineo.faku@inl.co.za

CIVIL society and shareholder activists turned up the heat on petrochemicals giant Sasol on Friday calling for the company to address their concerns of environmental pollution, gas emissions and fatalities in South Africa and Mozambique.

Representatives of six non-profit organisations told the company's top brass at the annual general meeting (AGM) held in Sandton, Joburg that aggrieved communities wanted the company to intervene in pollution in the Vaal River, "dirty air" on the Highveld and fatalities of employees.

Tracey Davies, an executive director at Just Share, an NGO that seeks to challenge companies to become good corporate citizens, was at the meeting to give vent to concerns about air pollution.

"The bottom line is that Sasol has a huge environmental footprint.

"We wanted to raise concerns about its (Sasol's) contribution to climate change in South Africa and Mozambique as well as fatalities," said Davies.

She however added that civil society could not act alone.

A damning report by the Centre for Environmental Rights, groundWork and the Highveld Environmental Justice Network, which was released last year, found that some Highveld residents had been diagnosed as suffering from respiratory and cardiac illnesses because of the government's controversial non-enforcement of minimum emission standards for Eskom and Sasol.

Davies said communities wanted the company to come up with tangible solutions to reduce its emissions to acceptable standards.

She charged that the Secunda facil-



SASOL'S offices in Sandton, north of Joburg. Activists have urged the petrochemical firm to address concerns over environmental pollution and fatalities at its plants in South Africa and Mozambique. | SIMPHIWE MBOKAZI African News Agency (ANA)

ity was one of the world's single largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

She also said communities wanted the company to account for the reduction of its financial provision for rehabilitation by R1.4 billion this year, which the company said was due to "macro-economic" changes.

In light of the fatalities, shareholder activist Theo Botha called for the remuneration of directors to be cut

amid continuing fatalities.

Botha said Sasol was not doing enough to address fatalities, with the company reporting that four employees had died in work accidents this year compared with the six killed last year.

Botha urged Sasol to increase its key performance indicator for safety to 10 percent from the current 5 percent.

"We have to hold management to

account.

"At the end of the day, if their bonus is smaller they will have to work on ensuring that fatalities are reduced to zero," he said.

Just Share, the Centre for Environmental Rights, a non-profit organisation and law clinic, the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance, groundWork, South Durban Community Environmental Alliance and Justica Ambien-

tal, a member of Friends of the Earth International based in Mozambique, attended the AGM.

Representatives of civil society also blamed Sasol for bleeding Mozambique by employing only 300 Mozambicans at the operations in that country.

Meanwhile, Sasol is in the middle of an empowerment storm, with trade union Solidarity striking over the company's empowerment scheme.