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Solwezi residents, Chamber of mines differ By Times Reporter

SOLWEZI residents differed with the Chamber of Mines at a heated public discussion on mining taxes, with some saying Lumwana and Kansanshi mining companies were giving Solwezi a raw deal.

Chamber of Mines general manager, Frederick Bantubonse articulated benefits of mining investments which he said accrued even before metal production commenced, but stakeholders to the meeting at the weekend were not convinced.

Mr Bantubonse said major benefits included economic and social infrastructure, taxes, employment, which he explained had risen from 19,000 at the time of privatisation to 24,000 people working in the mines, with another 24,000 created by contractors.

And with the Chamber of Mines representative accused of being defensive, the stakeholders wished Lumwana and Kansanshi were there to discuss for themselves the subject of "Mining Tax: An Endless Tug of War?"

The stakeholders were also disappointed that Solwezi Municipal Council shunned the meeting organised by Caritas, Centre for Policy and Development, Economics Association of Zambia, and Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia.

A local economist, Al Gwanu said the Chamber of Mines should have discussed challenges of the mines instead of just the positives, while another resident said with little benefits for Solwezi, it would be better to leave the minerals untouched for the future generation.

Allan Soneka accused the Chamber of Mines of being defensive, and wondered why mining companies were giving jobs which the Zambians were capable of doing to expatriates.

Former politician, Alina Nyikosa wondered whether mining companies knew that there was need for a ring road in Solwezi due to the damage caused to the Chingola-Solwezi (Lumwana) Road by heavy trucks.

And Kennedy Muluka wondered why Lumwana was distributing environmental booklets on radiation awareness written in English to villagers who could not read the foreign language.

Another resident wondered why there was only talk of copper and not other minerals at Kansanshi and Lumwana, when Kansanshi was mining gold and had even built a gold plant.

An economist representing the provincial administration, Rodney Machila said he had taken note of the concerns raised and said that, among other measures, a ring road for Solwezi had been proposed in the Sixth National Development Plan and in the integrated development plan for Solwezi.