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South African strikes spread to iron ore

Two fresh wildcat strikes have broken out in South Africa's beleaguered mining sector as the industry's worst crisis since the end of [apartheid in 1994 continued to escalate](#).

Kumba Iron Ore, a subsidiary of [Anglo American](#), said 300 workers at its Sishen mine – South Africa's biggest iron ore mine – downed tools on Tuesday night. It is the first industrial action to affect iron ore since the unrest began in the country's rich platinum belt in August at mines operated by Lonmin. Anglo said work at the mine had not been halted with the strike action contained to one area of its operations.

Harmony Gold, which had previously been unaffected by the industrial action, also said workers at its Kusasalethu mine had embarked on a wildcat strike. The mine accounts for about 14 per cent of the group's total production and is in the Carletonville area where thousands of miners employed by other gold companies are already on strike.

It is estimated that more than 75,000 miners are now on strike, with the industrial action affecting major companies including Gold Fields, Anglo American Platinum and AngloGold Ashanti, which has been forced to halt its entire South African operations.

Kumba said its striking miners were not represented by recognised unions, replicating a trend across the industry where workers appear to be increasingly dissatisfied with their traditional unions and are instead presenting demands through workers' representatives. This has complicated efforts to resolve disputes as workers' have become more militant.

Sishen is one of the world's seven largest open-pit mines and employs more than 10,000 people. Harmony said some of its miners at its Kusasalethu mine faced intimidation on Tuesday evening before workers presented demands, including wage issues, the following morning.

The industrial strife has been marked by intimidation and violence, in which more than [45 people have been killed, including 34 Lonmin strikers](#) shot by police.

Lonmin resolved its strike after agreeing to wage increases of up to 22 per cent, but that sparked concerns that it was setting a worrying precedent that would embolden other workers.

Other companies, including Gold Fields and Anglo American Platinum, have said they will not give into miners' demands, arguing that legally binding wage agreements are already in place.

Amplats has started taking disciplinary action against thousands of its workers at its Rustenburg mines, which could lead to large scale dismissals. But industry officials warn that such moves could exacerbate tensions in an already volatile climate.

