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South African Mine Re-opens as Tensions Continue

by Anita Powell

JOHANNESBURG – Tensions remain at a troubled South African platinum mine, where police shot and killed dozens of striking miners last week.

President Jacom Zuma declared a national week of mourning starting Monday following the shooting at the Lonmin mine northwest of Johannesburg.

But the workers also got a message from the company: get back to work or you are fired.

An official representing Lonmin mine said the ultimatum only applies to the 3,000 workers who started the strike that culminated in Thursday's confrontation in which police shot dead 34 miners.

According to the official, the other 25,000 workers were asked to return to work, but do not face consequences for disobeying. The official said she was not authorized to be quoted.

She said 27 percent of the workers showed up to work on Monday. A police spokesman said officers are in the area and there were no major incidents early Monday.

Meanwhile, a striker who was present during Thursday's shooting said the workers were planning to regroup and would not back down on their demands. The 24-year-old worker, who asked to be identified only by his first name, Siphiwo, did not give details.

"No, I am not going back to work," he insisted. "Until the management comes to us and agrees with us and comes to our demands, we are not going back to work. Today we are gathering again today ... If we go back to work, it means our brothers were killed for nothing."

Several-hundred arrested miners face charges including murder and attempted murder. Mining is one of South Africa's biggest industries. The events at the mine have had international consequences. In addition to affecting global platinum prices, Lonmin share prices have fallen.

Lonmin is the world's third-largest platinum producer. The precious metal is used in car parts and jewelry.

The event has also shaken South Africans who say such violent images of police firing at protesters remind them of the apartheid era.

President Zuma has called for an investigation, which will likely take months. In the meantime, tensions continue.