

Bench Marks calls for mine policy consistency at the rock face and for release of Presidential audit

Media Release by Bench Marks Foundation

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The Bench Marks Foundation has identified the lack of a 'safety-first culture' and transformation as contributing factors in mine workers' fatalities. This comes in the wake of three deaths in separate accidents last week, bringing the total this year to 135.

Bench Marks Foundation CEO John Capel criticised mining corporations' attitude towards worker safety and challenged them to put into practice what they preach "at the rock face".

"Research by the Bench Marks Foundation has found that often two very sets of cultures prevail in some mines. At the corporate and executive levels, there is commitment to and, more often than not, an implementation of transformation policies. Racism, however, has been shown the door at this level in most instances.

"It is regrettable, however, that racist attitudes at plant level, at the rock face, appears to contribute to mine safety sometimes being compromised, a culture that has bedeviled mining for over 100 years.

"It is only when mine owners identify this culture of racism that seems to permeate the mining industry that perhaps we will see a culture of human rights and human dignity promoted at this level," Capel said.

He added that a culture of transformation needs to permeate throughout mining companies. This culture needed to address these deeply embedded beliefs. He suggested that mini truth and reconciliation hearings could be held at plants where these attitudes could be addressed and forgiveness sought.

Two miners died in separate fall of ground incidents at Anglo Gold Ashanti's Tau Tona Mine and Harmony Gold. The third death was that of a miner who was injured at Anglo Platinum's Rustenburg mine a month ago.

Capel said that companies such as Anglo Gold Ashanti and Anglo Platinum needed to be taken to task, along with Harmony Gold, for seemingly not putting into practice their stated intentions. He noted that Anglo American, in particular, had called for a zero tolerance to mine accidents.

The Bench Marks Foundation is also concerned about the delays in releasing the presidential audit on mining safety that was commissioned by former President, Thabo Mbeki in 2007.

"Why has the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) not released the safety audit commissioned by President Mbeki in 2007? The delay in its release leads one to suspect that this could be a damning report that exposes a culture of production at all

costs, benefiting primarily shareholders and top management.

"We call on the DME and the new president to put lives first and to release the mine safety audit for public scrutiny and debate. Perhaps this study will throw some light on safety in mines and direct a culture of mine safety," Capel said.

The Bench Marks Foundation also believes that part of the problem lies in the alignment of top management performance with that of shareholder returns and the race for short- term profit maximisation at the expense of workers lives.

ENDS STATEMENT

Issued by Quo Vadis Communications on behalf of Bench Marks Foundation

The Bench Marks Foundation is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the focus on social sustainability and economic empowerment. The organisation encourages CSR that goes beyond reporting mechanisms and focuses on the gap between policy and practice, thereby assisting civil society groups and corporations to move beyond philanthropy to more strategic interventions that benefit both the corporations and society. Central to Bench Marks' agenda is how CSR is integrated into companies' operations and ensuring that it is at the core of every decision making process.