



Media Statement by Bench Marks Foundation

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MINORITIES THREATENED IN BOTSWANA

Botswana has come under heavy fire from a leading NGO that monitors corporate performance for its dealings with the "Basarwa" communities in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR).

The criticism is contained in a survey released in Johannesburg today by the Bench Marks Foundation.

The study, *De Beers, Botswana and the control of a country*, says that the Botswana government has often been heavy-handed in its dealings with these communities. This uneasy relationship has been exacerbated by Botswana's rapidly expanding mining industry and water shortage problems.

The question of water and mining took a further ominous turn when the Gana Kwi Kwe San communities in the CKGR won a long drawn out legal battle in December 2006 against their forced removal to make way for mining.

John Capel, chief executive of the Foundation, says the Botswana government responded in a typically totalitarian manner to the community's victory by smashing wells and boreholes leaving them without water.

The study says that the government should not use its power to award mining licences in such a way that it deprives communities which might object to the awarding of such licences of their human rights.

"Even more cynically", says Capel, "the government awarded mining rights to Gem Diamonds in the CKGR on condition that the company does not supply water to the affected communities."

The study notes that while Debswana denies any intention of mining on Kwe San land, its silence on the human rights abuses committed against the CKGR communities is instructive. Also of concern is the fact that the Botswana government is allowing prospecting in the conservation areas such as the CKGR. Debswana is also silent about the issuing of prospecting and mining licences in such areas.

Another matter of concern is that communities are not involved in the drafting of environmental impact assessments (EIAs), or in setting up of environmental management plans (EMPs). They are also not meaningfully consulted in the granting of mining licences.

"The effect of the 50% shareholding by government in Debswana has been to marginalise communities on whose ancestral lands the mining occurs," Capel says.

The study points out that Kwe-speaking hunters and herders have lived in Botswana for many thousands of years. The government refers to these people as the "Basarwa/Mosarwa". These people themselves object to the terms "Basarwa/Mosarwa", and do not accept the name "Khoisan".

“In modern Botswana, there is a grave concern for the rights of this ancient community. San communities have often been relocated during the last century in Botswana to facilitate the intensification of cattle production, for the promotion of wildlife tourism, for bureaucratic conveniences and for the exploration of minerals,” Capel said.

This Bench Marks Foundation research on the diamond industry in Botswana is a continuation of the broader SADC research initiative into the extractive industry. The main focus is CSR practice of mining companies regarding the three basic dimensions of sustainable development – economical, social and environmental – in the areas in which they operate.

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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.

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