



MEDIA STATEMENT BY BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION

Churches called to support true CSR

15 June 2011

Churches have been challenged to support responsible investment, sustainable systems of production and sound economic development policies for poor communities.

The call was made by The Bench Marks Foundation on 14 June at its 2011 Annual General Meeting; in which communities shared their experiences regarding the manner in which companies, in their areas, carry out corporate social responsibility.

According to John Capel, Executive Director of The Bench Marks Foundation, the call for churches to support responsible investment is as a result of an assessment of the way in which many companies invest in Africa today – generally without a thought as to the long-term effects on that country or the human rights aspects.

“We are calling on churches for social stewardship and to promote the protection of the environment for present and future generations,” said Capel.

“Throughout history, churches have played an integral part in lobbying for change. A collective stand by churches could help in bringing about the implementation of the rights of workers and communities as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international protocols”.

In a room filled with representatives of businesses, government, a variety of churches and members of the civil society sector, community members said that what corporates say and do are two different things. They are not seeing the benefits that are often promised to them.

Speaking at the meeting, which was titled Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) – ‘the Truth’, Capel appealed to the many church representatives who were attending, to take part in bridging the gap between corporates and communities.

“The call for active participation is not limited to a particular faith, we are looking for a broad-based campaign of church leaders from a variety of religious faiths and other civil society organisations to fight for responsible investments that provide for the needs of people, not just for the shareholders or CEOs of major industries,” said Capel.

By making this call, The Bench Marks Foundation’s intention is to assist in developing a universal perspective among church leaders on what responsible investment is.

“We believe it is possible to redesign our system of production so that it is sustainable,” said Capel. “A system of production that is based on cheap labour, which destroys earth’s resources and that is based on greed; creating wealth for only a few is not sustainable.”

The Bench Marks Foundation was launched in 2001 by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in response to the churches’ call in 1993 to monitor and hold businesses accountable in the new South Africa and in Southern Africa. It is chaired by Bishop Jo Seoka.

For more information on the call to church leaders to support responsible investment, sustainable systems of production and sound economic development policies, please contact the Bench Marks Foundation at 011 832 1742/3 or email simo@bench-marks.org.za.

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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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