



## **MEDIA STATEMENT BY BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION**

### **Accountability and investment needed in squatter camps around mines**

**For immediate release, Monday 16 July 2012**

The situation for those who live in informal settlements around mines is abysmal with overcrowding, a lack of proper sanitation and potable water as well as a lack of electricity the norm, says the Bench Marks Foundation.

In addition, the organisation says there is a marked increase in social problems such as crime, prostitution and gangsterism in these areas filtering down to the surrounding communities.

In a statement marking international World Population Day on 11 July 2012, John Capel, Executive Director of the Bench Marks Foundation, said that the plight of the populations surrounding mines should not be forgotten nor should their issues only be highlighted on one day.

“It is vitally important to highlight the situation facing those living in informal settlements around the mines as well as the communities nearby as regularly as possible, so that action can be taken to ease the strains felt by all involved,” says Capel.

He said that the majority of the informal settlements have come about as a result of mines not providing housing for the migrants they hire and paying them an inadequate living-out allowance. Miners are then forced to find cheap accommodation in the surrounding villages or settle in shacks near to the mines.

“There is an increased strain on the surrounding towns and its infrastructure as a result of the ever-increasing numbers in the informal settlements, this is a direct result of mining and mining corporations ignore this,” says Capel.

“The high level of unemployment as a result of closures of certain mines due to the steady decline in South African mining output has put even more pressure on the situation. Those who have lost their jobs are unable to return to their homes as a result of a lack of funds. For some, turning to a life of crime is one way to survive. For others, sex work is another option.

“Mines have made huge profits in the several preceding years. Anglo Platinum in 2010 made R46 billion profit. Why is it that companies do not make provision for the possibility of tough times when the going is good?” asks Capel. “Part of being a good corporate citizen is having sustainability practices that consider broader society and not just the narrow interests of the shareholders. This will contribute to the overall development of the country.”

“Another red flag that shouldn’t be ignored”, says Capel “is the way the mines attract migrant labour without providing the necessary resources to deal with them. These labourers flock at the promise of jobs. This influx creates tension between indigenous communities and migrant labour.”

“A resident from Kanana, an area close to Klerksdorp said that although the community is close to eleven diamond and gold mines, the rate of unemployment is extremely high,” says Capel. “She says the reason for this is that the mines prefer to employ illegal immigrants as opposed to locals as they can pay lower wages.”

With regard to crime, Capel quoted an example from the community of Robega in Rustenburg which is very close to a squatter camp.

“They have told us that they experience high levels of crime and general lawlessness in their area. They are attributing this directly to the increase in migrant labour. Irritation and distrust increases daily with every mugging.

Says Capel: “We continue to see mines engaged in a process of a smoke and mirrors when it comes to migrant labour. Migrant labour is disguised through the living-out allowance. Through this, they shift the costs and responsibilities for housing, security, feeding and health onto the resources of the already overstretched local government authorities, the workers themselves not to mention members of surrounding communities. What is really needed is for mines to take responsibility for migrant labour by providing proper housing and services. This will, to some extent, avoid xenophobic attacks while simultaneously working out local employment targets.

“To turn a blind eye on the situation in these areas and the vast population that would be affected would be disastrous. No more smoke and mirrors. Accountability and investment in these areas is essential.”

**ENDS**

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Bench Marks Foundation is an independent non-governmental organisation mandated by churches to monitor the practices of multi-national corporations to

- ensure they respect human rights;
- protect the environment;
- ensure that profit-making is not done at the expense of other interest groups; and
- ensure that those most negatively impacted upon are heard, protected and accommodated within the business plans of the corporations.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu launched the Foundation in 2001 and the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka chairs the organisation.

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