



**MEDIA STATEMENT BY BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION**

**Church Leaders adopt an African-wide campaign**

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**For immediate release**

A tool to forge a broad-based campaign of church leaders, leaders of other religious faiths and civil society organisations aimed at serving the needs of people was launched by Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka, Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation in Kempton Park today.

The *Church Leaders Call for Responsible Investment* is a living and growing document that aims to develop a common perspective among church leaders on what is responsible development.

Church leaders from around Africa gathered together to endorse the document and pledged their support to assist in developing it as a statement for the larger community of citizens of the African Continent.

“In 1993, churches became concerned about the role of business in a new South Africa along with a concern about South African business expansion in Africa,” said Seoka.

“We were asking ourselves the questions: Would business respect human rights? Would they promote human dignity and would they promote development and sustainable practices?”

“The churches felt that this might not be the case and called for a code of conduct to govern business thus the *Church Leaders Call for Responsible Investment* was created.

The Church leaders call for:

1. Social stewardship and protection of the environment for present and future generations – we have the responsibility to take care of the land and environment;
2. Support for a system of production which serves the needs of all people and preserves the environment. A system of production that is based on cheap labour, insecure work and results in mass unemployment is the cause for large scale poverty, crime, ill health and death and is therefore not sustainable;
3. Respect for the land, people, and local resources where business is conducted. Business places profit for shareholders above respect for the rights of people, their land and way of life. People who reside in areas where there are mineral resources do not benefit from the wealth that this land generates;
4. Pollution free and environmentally responsible business operations. Businesses today have access to technology that could reduce pollution and environmentally destructive operations down to a very low level. However these changes would increase their costs of production and therefore reduce their profits and rather

- than bear the costs, they pass the responsibility to solve the problem of pollution to communities;
5. The implementation of the rights of workers and communities as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international protocols. These rights include the right to a living wage, the right to belong to a trade union, to collective bargaining and the abolition of child labour;
  6. The provision of free access to healthcare for all workers and family members. Where the activities of a corporation in any way negatively impact on the health of communities, such access to be extended to the affected communities;
  7. An acknowledgement of the important role women play in social and economic life and the end of all forms of gender discrimination. Women continue to suffer discrimination and carry the burden in communities;
  8. Affirmation of indigenous peoples' right to full participation in the business decisions that pertain to their environment, ancestral lands and way of life. They have lived off their land for centuries and their survival depends on their continued control over their land;
  9. The end to all forms of forced seizure of land and removals or relocation of communities by governments and corporations;
  10. Government and companies to recognise the principle of Free Prior and Continuous Consent and grant adequate compensation based on the mineral value of the land which the community occupies. Proper negotiations with the entire community is required and compensation given for the value of their mineral resources and reserves. Free prior consent is required for every phase of the life of the mine through to closure and completion;
  11. Legislation to prohibit officials sitting on boards of private companies or holding any position where any benefit would accrue to them because of their official position. Government officials must serve the interest of the electorate and the people and not be influenced by private business interests;
  12. Government investment policies which prioritise the needs of people and protection of the environment. All government funds are monies held in trust on behalf of the people of the country. This money must be invested and used in a way that serves the interests of the people;
  13. Companies to pay all taxes required by law and not use elaborate schemes to avoid paying tax. Mining companies should pay royalties for the use of land and resources;
  14. Companies to demonstrate that they operate in a way that balances the needs of their employees and communities and those most impacted upon and not make profit for shareholders at the expense of other interest groups;
  15. Commitment by corporations to responsible reporting and providing free access to information on all company activities to the public; and
  16. Independent monitoring of the conduct of corporations and their suppliers by local non-governmental and community organisations.

"We are calling out to all those who were unable to be here today to send their endorsements and comments to us so that we can add their names to the list," says Seoka. "This is an Africa-wide campaign, so we need everyone to get involved".

The Bishop adds: "The situation for communities and mineworkers throughout Africa will not change unless we, including the communities we serve, monitor and exert pressure on corporations and governments to change the way they conduct business and to become more community aware".

To access the endorsement document for *The Church Leaders Call for Responsible Investment*, go to [www.bench-marks.org.za](http://www.bench-marks.org.za) or contact Bench Marks on +27 11 832 1743/2.

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**Notes to editors:**

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.