



MEDIA STATEMENT BY BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION

Communities impacted upon by mining want real holistic development

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For immediate release

Government involvement in mining is essential, but it needs to lead to the betterment of those communities that depend upon mining operations as well as those who are affected by mining.

According to John Capel, Executive Director of the Bench Marks Foundation, certain aspects mentioned by Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe in his address at the International Mining History Congress in Johannesburg on 17 April 2012, made sense and if managed correctly, could make a significant difference to historically problematic areas in mining.

Says Capel: "But there are many things that we as an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of corporate social responsibility,, have recommended during the course of our research into the CSR practices of the mining industry that can be immediately implemented by the government and would make a profound difference."

"One of these recommendations is for it to become more involved in ensuring that mining operators are complying with the laws of the land and not exploiting the citizens of the country. Another is for it to ensure that environmental impact assessments are occurring on an ongoing basis and for it to take a lead role in the sustainable development of mining.

"In addition, the government needs to put measures in place that will stop its officials from enriching themselves from mining and appearing on mining companies' boards which has compromising consequences for the public good – a sure way to address what Motlanthe raised with regard to the small minority enriching themselves from the mining industry."

Capel said that Bench Marks welcomes the idea of increased local procurement and fair prices for local manufacturers and support a fair share of the mining returns going to the fiscus, but emphasises that a fair share should also be going back into the communities affected by mining.

"Historically, small towns were built around mines. Recreation centres, schools and houses were built. But now we have mines skirting the issue of looking out for its staff by giving out living out allowances which has created informal settlements with a lack of infrastructure and many negative socio-economic impacts."

He also said that the organisation agrees that transformation within the industry is required, but that it needs to be managed carefully.

“Bringing more women into the industry is essential, but measures need to be put into place to ensure that they are adequately protected. Sexual abuse of women is a common occurrence in the industry. Proper frameworks are required in order to ensure that the environment is made safer for women.”

Capel agreed that mineral rights should go where they can be best used – to develop the country – but he said that it should also include communities and that community engagement, involvement and upliftment should be a standard line item in every mining company’s agenda, and indeed promoted by government.

“Communities impacted upon by mining and who make way for mining are no longer prepared to accept the status quo. They want real development that incorporates their needs, jobs, skills, and their human development potential. They want a share of the wealth. They want to be the preferred black economic empowerment partners.

“Failure to incorporate the needs of communities will negate any plans the government may make with regard to mining and will not have the positive impact it hopes to achieve.”

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 Rt Rev Dr Bishop Jo Seoka.

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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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