

Address by Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe on the Occasion of the Bench Marks Foundation Conference.

14 October 2013.

Programme Director;
Chairman of the Bench Marks Foundation, Right Reverent Bishop Seoka, and;
Other members of Bench Marks Foundation;
Partners of the Bench Marks Foundation;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for inviting me to address you on the state of the South African Mining Industry. I take it as a singular honour.

From the onset let me commend the Bench Marks Foundation for its research initiatives that are aimed at resolving social problems affecting mineworkers, communities and the mining sector.

This is even more remarkable because the Bench Marks Foundation is an independent organisation made up of non-governmental, religious and other community organisations that cut across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

Furthermore the Bench Marks Foundation supported by international partners, and working with other research institutions and organisations, applies evidence based and activist research for measuring responsible business practice.

The Foundation's research methodology is invaluable for providing perspectives and voices that are an approximation of the real situation.

Such interventions are important for measuring the social, economic and environmental externalities that accrue from activities of large corporations.

But most important of all the Foundation's research work also strengthens the ability of communities to engage with business and government from an informed and level-footed perspective.

Your Policy Gap 6 Review states; overarching principles the Bench Marks research calls for:

- A sustainable and equitable system of production and distribution;
- Preservation of the environment for present and future generations;
- Stakeholder participation by the most affected and afflicted communities, as well as;
- The general promotion of life and freedom for all.

The Bench Marks Foundation's work emulates that of the pioneers of the struggle such as Sol Tshekiso Plaatje and Charlotte Maxeke to name but a few. This year marks the 100 anniversary of the promulgation of the natives land act.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Nearly a hundred years ago, in 1914, author, activist and founding Secretary-General of the African National Congress,

Sol Plaatje described the working conditions of mine workers as follows:

“Two hundred thousand subterranean heroes who, by day and by night, for a mere pittance, lay down their lives to the familiar “fall of rock” and who, at deep levels ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 feet in the bowels of the earth, sacrifice their lungs to the rock dust which develops miner’s phthisis and pneumonia.”

Today despite the positive changes introduced by the efforts of organised labour, organised business and government, through new policy and legislation, workers still experience some of the same problems.

As you are aware the mining industry has for all these years thrived by relying on a raft of discriminatory legislation that enabled it to make super-profits drawn from the super-exploitation of unskilled workers and an archaic migrant labour system.

These problems cannot be addressed by any one group acting alone; they will require collaborative partnerships by all stakeholders— be they organised business, organised labour and all other role players with each partner bringing unique insights and better understandings to the table.

In July this year, organised labour, organised business and government, recognising this need for collaborative partnership, adopted the Framework Agreement for a Sustainable Mining Industry.

The framework sets out key actions and steps required to stabilise South Africa’s mining sector and place it on a sustainable footing.

The Framework Agreement identifies both short-term and medium to long term measures required to address the problems of mining.

Ensuring the rule of law, peace and stability and the provision of proper and sustainable human settlement infrastructure in the Rustenburg Platinum belt were identified as some of the short-term measures requiring immediate action.

Our observation is that all parties have so far lived up to their commitment to ensure that peace and stability prevails during strikes and other protests relating to labour disputes.

The Mine Crime Combating Forum was launched in August this year and trade unions and mining companies are cooperating with the South African Police Service to maintain peace and stability in the mines and surrounding communities.

Both government and business have committed to avail financial resources to ensure provision of proper and sustainable human settlement infrastructure in the Rustenburg Platinum belt. A technical team is working with the local municipality to determine the full scope of the project.

Medium to long term measures include reviewing the migrant labour system, annual assessment of the implementation of the Mining Charter and the reskilling of workers to achieve competitiveness and sustainable growth of the mining sector.

Another team is also working with various government departments on the improvement of health and safety in mines including the compensation of former mineworkers who suffer from occupational diseases as well as conditions such as silicosis.

Government is engaging with individual mining companies on how best to implement these medium to long term measures. Your report on Lonmin would serve as a helpful starting point . Discussions will continue at the next Mining Sector Forum meeting next month where we expect more concrete proposals from all stakeholders.

Programme Director:

Through the South African National Council (SANAC) we are already making in-roads through close collaboration with other stakeholders to respond to the high rate of co-infection of TB and HIV which are more prevalent in informal settlements and in the mines.

Research shows gold mines have three times the amount of TB infections when compared to populations that are not exposed to silica dust.

Our intervention in the mining sector as SANAC include:

- Ensuring that all mine workers, particularly in the gold sector, are frequently screened and tested for TB and HIV ;
- Equipping mine health facilities with gene expert technology to ensure rapid testing for TB; this technology takes 2hours to give results to someone testing for TB
- Upgrading some of the existing health facilities in the mines to provide treatment and care for multidrug resistant and extremely multidrug resistant TB, and;
- Opening mine health facilities to provide care and treatment to members of communities; and neighbouring mines where access to health care is limited.

We will continue to measure progress, problems encountered and compliance against the set targets.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

There is still much to be done to address these challenges facing the mining industry. To that end, the improvement in productivity, innovation, human resource development and training is an absolute imperative.

A critical part of this will involve ensuring that we transform the migrant labour system in a manner that makes workers feel valued for their contribution and are respected as wholesome human beings that must have decent jobs and sustainable livelihoods, including proper housing, recreation and time with families. In our engagements with the mining houses we would like them to consider a system that would enable workers to spend time with their families.

Comprehensive effort is crucial in ensuring that we accelerating transformation of the industry by eliminating the negative social and economic legacies of our past and by taking necessary steps to create greater certainty and predictability in policy and regulations.

We must also ensure that mining plans are comprehensive and include adequate planning for sustain human settlements with the requisite amenities and infrastructure.

The Framework Agreement for a sustainable mining industry to which I alluded earlier identifies the need to accelerate the provision of integrated human settlement and proper housing for mineworkers.

On a longer-term we must explore international best practice on rotational migration systems that ensure miners spend adequate time with families and the development of the local economies in the labour forwarding areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Allow me to conclude by stating my conviction that it is possible to have a thriving mining sector that is balanced and equitable in distributing the economic returns for the benefit of all people.

Working together we can improve the fortunes workers as well as communities and equal the challenges that confront the mining sector.

Remember that the past we inherit, the future we create.

I thank you