

Draft press statement Mantashe (Gwede) on Mining Charter

The Bench Marks Foundation is concerned that this weekend planned meeting with labour, business and governments excludes communities.

In a recent debate on TV the new mineral resource minister the honourable minister Mr Mantashe when asked about the participation of communities knee jerk response was that he would visit mining communities.

There are 2500 operational mines in South Africa with 6000 abandoned mines. Just how is the new minister going to visit thousands of communities? What the minister might not be aware of is that there are number of organised communities and networks representing communities and many civil society organisations who work with communities. Macua, Bua, Mejcon, Gubico and others that should be involved, along with their civil society counterparts.

Communities bear the brunt of mining activities suffering livelihood loss, forced removals, health and safety impacts, water and air contamination, yet they are excluded. Recently they joined co joined an application with the Chamber of Mines, where the court stated communities must be part of the charter debate.

The minister seems to be ignoring this and doing like his predecessors have done, that is by passing probably the most important stakeholder group. The Chamber of mines a few months ago informed me that there are at least 3 community protests a day around mining operations.

Given the land debate and the recent parliament decision to expropriate land one wonders how the minister will deal with the often the forced removals of community land for mining.

We call on the minister to convene meetings with organised community formations that exist across the country and to include them in any charter redrafting process. Labour, business and government can agree on a new charter, but communities are not going to sit idly by while important decisions are made that directly impact them. The motto of communities is nothing about us without us.

Mining is being punted as sunrise industry when most of our traditional resources like gold and to some extent platinum are becoming sunset industries. Thus what needs to be included in the charter abandoned mines and rehabilitation of them. Most of these mines have escaped closure plans and daily others are put on care and maintenance thus the industry avoids cleaning up and leaves the legacy issues of mines impacting communities. Last year Bench Marks released its study on gold mining areas and the continual impacts of mine dumps on people's health and safety. Communities we found suffered a host of respiratory illnesses and water pollution that have killed thousands of people. Yet unlike the listeriosis issue nothing has been done to prevent mining externalising countless forms of diseases impacting communities.

We hope the new minister will be progressive is in his attitude and address these issues and develop a relationship with civil society to counter the enormous cost on peoples around mining. As Bench Marks says, there are winners and losers in mining. The winners are the investors and shareholders and the losers communities.

