



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Illegal mining threat reports are baseless

Johannesburg, Wednesday 28 November 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media articles claiming that small scale mining by so-called zama zamas is posing a threat to Johannesburg's safety are completely baseless, according to the Bench Marks Foundation.

Bench Marks' lead researcher, David van Wyk, who has worked closely with zama zamas over the past five years, says that there is no evidence whatsoever that these miners are using explosives which could cause gas and fuel lines to explode under various Johannesburg landmarks.

"These allegations are part of a campaign at local level to fan the flames of xenophobia in an attempt to secure the votes of coloured populations in Riverlea, Davidsonville and Fleurhof. This might actually lead to a race war. It is further part of the Department of Mineral Resources' (DMR) attempt to divert attention from the court victory against it on Friday last week which gave communities the right to say no to mining," van Wyk said.

However, he noted that the DMR had given licences to mining companies situated on top of gas pipelines that *did* operate at a technological and resource level requiring blasting.

"The media has never reported that these mines pose a threat to the city. Why is this suddenly an issue? Neither the City of Johannesburg, Sasol nor Transnet has credible disaster management plans for such an explosion," he said.

Van Wyk did, however, point out several challenges posed by mines that could become as much if not a bigger threat than the work of zama zamas.

"For example, Central Rand Gold has a licence to re-mine the underground workings of Crown Mines, including stripping the pillars of the board and pillar operations below Riverlea and the FNB Stadium.

"In addition, acid water from Crown Mine operations has risen to less than 200 meters below the surface. With one of two years of good rains, this toxic soup will spill to the surface.

“Scrap metal dealers are encouraging metal thieves to cut up the old tailings supply pipes around FNB Stadium and are selling this radioactive scrap. Thieves may also strip the access point covers,” he said.

Van Wyk added that the number of miners in artisanal and small scale mining (ASM) in South Africa is estimated to be in excess of 30 000.

ASM is practiced extensively as an alternative economic activity in times of stress, such as the period of massive retrenchments which followed the 2008/9 financial crisis and the decades-long abandonment of hundreds of mines around Johannesburg.

It is also largely informal and unregulated, short of finance, technologically backward, and a significant proportion of the sector’s activities are illegal. ASM provides a form of livelihood for the miners, but there is usually no net generation of wealth.

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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.

The Foundation was launched in 2001 by the Rt. Rev Dr Jo Seoka who chairs the organisation and by member churches of the SACC.

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