



## Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

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### Mindset Shift needed for new way of Mining

Johannesburg, Monday 22 October 2018

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

It is imperative that South Africa adopts a new way of mining that fits in with a vision of a sustainable society, according to the Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation, Bishop Jo Seoka.

Speaking at the opening of the organisation's annual conference in Johannesburg today, Bishop Seoka said that its realisation "requires us to collectively engage in changing the current economic model in this country".

He added that a major mindset shift was needed by government and business to recognise the humanity, dignity and needs of communities, to acknowledge the right of mining impacted communities to experience the new dawn vision, and to recognise the simple and basic right to be related to and treated with dignity as human beings.

He noted: "We already know that on paper South Africa is one of the richest countries on the planet. Yet this 'wealth' based mainly on the extractive industries, cheap labour and high unemployment has not benefitted the vast majority of South Africans and has resulted in an ecological overshoot which has led to the degradation of our environment and poses a real threat to our food and water sovereignty. But most of all we concerned about people, communities who bear the brunt of mining, losing their livelihoods, access to water and dignity.

"What we know is that gold is coming to an end, more than 50% of platinum is being recycled, and coal is causing more destruction, affecting food security and health. The major mining houses will in all probability be gone in ten to fifteen years, leaving us with very little or nothing at all. Evidently, we are running out of certain minerals, and other minerals can no longer be profitably mined, while the cost of mining of others are simply too destructive of our environment, air and water resources."

Bishop Seoka asked who the winners and losers would be should such a new dawn for mining did not materialise.

"I leave this question largely unanswered. Suffice to say that government and business have a unique opportunity to institute change now. This includes entering into peaceful dialogue, informed by the vision of a better life now, for all South Africans. If they shun this opportunity, the nightmare will gain ever more frightening proportions. Communities and organisations supporting them will be driven to intensified protest, and who knows what else he said."

Earlier in his speech, Bishop Seoka outlined two new services offered by Bench Marks Foundation as practical ways in which a paradigm shift could come about. These are the Independent Capacity Building Fund (ICF) and the Independent Problem Solving Service (IPSS).

"Firstly, the ICF addresses skewed power relations, allowing communities access to knowledge, skills and specialist expertise to advise them, whether on environment or social and economic impacts, or how to shape development in mining areas. We say you can't have effective dialogue in an unequal power relationship. Power between equals opens ways to solutions. Secondly, the ICF will support the IPSS, which is also developmental in approach.

"The IPSS involves an alternative dispute resolution and problem solving approach instead of company led grievance mechanisms that largely don't work, to produce positive outcomes acceptable to all stakeholders. This tool is based on an interventionist approach using highly skilled impartial facilitators to act as intermediaries between communities and mining companies, and using dialogue and trust building to resolve problems in a non-adversarial and non-evidence based system. This service is being established in consultation with all role players and is designed

to effectively resolve problems between all affected stakeholders in the mining sector. Its desired outcomes are sustainable, developmental solutions, aimed at going beyond remedies to address poverty and inequality in all its dimensions, including unemployment and to create meaningful livelihoods," he said.

**The conference is being held at the Sunnyside Hotel in Parktown, Johannesburg. For media accreditation, please contact Ruth Coggin at [ruth@quo-vadis.co.za](mailto:ruth@quo-vadis.co.za) or on 082-903-5819.**

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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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