



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Mines shouldn't use legacy as an excuse for not doing what it should

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mining company Impala Platinum braved the lion's den by participating in the Bench Marks Foundation's panel discussion on labour and community relations post Marikana, during the organisation's fifth annual conference.

The conference held in Johannesburg on 17 and 18 November 2014, was aimed at asking questions about the lessons learnt from Marikana and the future of the mining industry, and consisted of delegates from mining communities, embassies, government departments, NGO, civil society and churches from across Africa, Germany, Sweden and Norway.

"Of all the mines invited Impala Platinum, represented by John Theron, Group Executive: Corporate Relations, was the only one that agreed to take part in our discussions," said John Capel, Executive Director for the Bench Marks Foundation.

"In fact, there was a noticeable absence of mining houses in the audience with Lonmin being the only other mining house there.

"And although they confirmed that they would be part of our panel, the Department of Minerals and Resources stood us up. The department's absence was a disappointment as it would have been very useful to find out their plans for the sector for the future and have their input in all the discussions".

Johan Theron admitted that there was a trust and legitimacy deficit in the industry and this needed to be worked on in order for communities, workers and mines to move forward.

He also said that companies need to ensure that its social and labour plans and commitments are more accessible to those who ask to see them, especially if it will improve the relationship between company and community.

In response to fellow speaker, Alan Fine from Russell and Associates who said that South Africans are angry at the legacy of mining since the 1880s and that the industry shouldn't use this legacy as an excuse for not doing things differently, Theron said that solutions for change can only be found through forums such as this.

"I am talking to you from out of a glass house. We are not perfect as an industry or as a company. Marikana was a seminal event in history and I personally feel a responsibility to change things. We all do," said Theron.

“We need to get past the point of apportioning blame and learn from what happened. We need to do things differently. If practical answers and ideas come out of the conference, we would like to hear them because things need to change!”

Capel said that there is a strong role for everyone to become regulators of the industry and that if South Africa is to have a sustainable mining environment, the proceeds need to be distributed in a more equitable manner. New models need to be introduced and mining communities should not be looked at as an irritant.

“There needs to be proper consultation with communities and should mining occur in their community, they should not be worse off than they were prior to mining.

“If their land is taken, they should automatically get shares as their lives have been impacted on and even if relocated, their way of life will never be the same,” said Capel.

“Another thing that needs to change is the ownerships and relationships with those in government. There are too many politically connected people on the boards of mines. This is polluting the industry and hampers any change in the sector.

“If we’ve learnt anything from Marikana, it’s that politics and mining is a deadly combination”.

Delegates of the conference raised many issues for discussion and debate in an attempt to forge a way forward for the industry.

Among these were issues pertaining to water, mine closures, abandoned mines and illegal miners, audits, exploitation, gender inequality and security concerns for women, environmental degradation, stakeholder relations, taxation, transparency, lack of commitment to communities by government and mines and profit sharing.

Many of these issues were workshopped and debated on during the conference resulting in a clear understanding that independent monitoring and evaluation, adherence to corporate governance, partnerships and accountability is essential going forward.

“People starved themselves for five months during the strike in August 2012 in Marikana. Many couldn’t walk as they were so weak from hunger. They were fighting for their dignity. The mining houses and government demonised this,” says Capel.

“We need holistic change in the industry. We need transformation and radical modifications if we don’t want it to implode.

“All stakeholders need to be involved in this process. Too many lives depend on it”.

The theme of the Bench Marks Foundation’s conference was ‘Enough is Enough: Change Now!’ focussed on what, if anything, has changed since Marikana and what can be done going forward. Speakers included Ms Gross Wiesmann from the Department of Cooperation and Development for the German Embassy, representatives from the Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Gender Equality and the Public Protector’s Office.

For more information about Bench Marks Foundation and its work, go to www.bench-marks.org.za.