



Media Statement by Bench Marks Foundation
More tough times forecast for women in mining

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For immediate release

Sustainable Women Empowerment and Gender Equality was the theme for this year's Women's Day and Month, but for women within mines and in the communities surrounding mines there is very little evidence that they have been empowered.

In fact, says the Bench Marks Foundation, one can argue that life has become more difficult and dangerous for them.

"Two perfect examples of this is the death of the female union leader at Lonmin's Marikana mine, four days before the first anniversary of the Marikana massacre, and the disregard for the widows of those miners who were killed on 16 August 2012," says John Capel, Executive Director for the Bench Marks Foundation, an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

"The widows are not being afforded the opportunity to hear what actually happened on that fateful day as the Farlam Commission drags on with hearsay evidence and postponements occurring incessantly.

"The women continue to be victims of a situation that should have been resolved by now. Instead of closure, they face escalating legal costs as the state refuses to budge on the issue of funding, together with the costs of travelling backwards and forwards to the hearing.

"In addition, their attempt to create some sort of livelihood is constantly interrupted by the commission," says Capel.

"Life is tough for these women who have already endured so much pain and suffering. And as for the rest of the women in the area, they live in fear as assassinations and tensions continue."

Capel also says that as South Africa reaches the end of Women's month, the organisation has reflected on what has been done to ease the plight of women in mines and those in communities surrounding mines.

"What we found is that despite assurances from some companies that circumstances for women have been improved and that more emphasis has been placed on gender equality, this is not the case for the majority of mines.

"Women still face sexual harassment and exploitation. Although better than a decade ago, women are still very much in minority in management and in the lower paid categories. Women still bear the brunt of machoism."

“And although we appealed to the government, especially to the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities and the Department of Labour, to regularly investigate the conditions for women in these areas early last year, we also fail to see evidence of that happening.”

Says Capel: “What is also of grave concern to us is the imminent retrenchments of thousands of mineworkers by companies such as Anglo American Platinum.

“This will further escalate the dire socio-economic situation for the women and children throughout South Africa who depend upon these breadwinners for survival.

“Never mind the ripple effect these retrenchments will have on the economy.”

For more information on the various studies The Bench Marks Foundation has embarked on within the mining environment, go to www.bench-marks.org.za or contact Bench Marks on 011 832 1743.

Notes to editors:

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.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu launched the Foundation in 2001 and the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka chairs the organisation.

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