



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

New Dawn or continuing Nightmare?

Johannesburg, Monday 22 October 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Whether there is a new dawn for mining impacted communities, or whether their past and current nightmare of existence continues will be the focus of the annual conference of the Bench Marks Foundation, starting today [Monday 22 October] in Johannesburg.

Chairperson of Bench Marks, Bishop Jo Seoka, will be the first to address the topic in his keynote address, in which he will call for reparation for the negative impacts of mining operations on communities, and the halting of further damage to communities by mines.

Bishop Seoka will also call for the restoration of a dignified way of life for communities, including land, livelihoods and capacity to manage their own lives.

His speech will be followed by Advocate Tseliso Thipanyane, CEO of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), who is expected to hone in on human rights issues relating to the mining industry.

A panel discussion on Monday afternoon will put the spotlight again onto the main topic of the conference. Panellists will be Dr Aninka Claassens, director at the Land and Accountability Research Centre (LARC) of the University of Cape Town, Ms Yasmin Sooka, Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights (FHR), Professor Mavis "May" Hermanus, visiting adjunct professor at the Centre for Sustainability in Mining and Industry (CSMI) at the University of the Witwatersrand, and Ms Alex Fitzgerald, Senior Legal Officer at the South African Human Rights Commission (SARHC).

In the evening the community monitoring school of the Bench Marks will use live theatre to tell its story around mining, and its investigations, findings and capacity needs.

This will be followed by a response from several prominent NGOs who will participate in a session about strategies for change in the struggles around mining. They are the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS), the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS), Mining Affected Communities United in Action (Macua), the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER), Seriti Foundation, Society, Work and Development

Institute (SWOP), WOMIN, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) and the International Alliance on Natural Resources in Africa (IANRA).

Lastly a graduation ceremony of the community activist capacity building programme, one of Bench Marks' flagship projects, will take place.

On the second day Bench Marks will present its work over the last year. This will be done in exhibitions and various visual presentations, covering its research on corporations, community voices on their lived experience, and reporting on progress of its Independent Problem Solving Service. This will be done along with its newest endeavour, the Bench Marks Rating Agency - Corporate Personality Index, that measures the company personality profile and whether the company is a "good neighbour". Initial findings will be showcased.

In addition the conference will hear how big corporations view the organisation. Mr Bheki Khumalo, head of government relations for Anglo American, will be one of four respondents who will participate.

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent non-governmental organisation established by various church organisations to monitor the investment practices of multinational corporations. This is done to ensure that they respect human rights and operate in a way that protects the environment, that profit making is not done at the expense of other interest groups, and that those most negatively impacted on are heard, protected and accommodated within the business plans of the corporation.

Members of the media who wish to attend the sessions should please register with Ruth Coggin on ruth@quo-vadis.co.za or 082-903-5819. The conference begins at 14h00 on Monday 22 October at the Sunnyside Park Hotel, Parktown, Johannesburg.

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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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