



## **Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation**

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### **No Place in the Sun for Mining Communities**

Johannesburg, Monday 22 October 2018

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

There is currently no place in the sun for mining-impacted communities in South Africa, and the cold darkness of the night continues for them as they are excluded from any meaningful consultation or decision making processes.

This was one of the messages from the Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation, Bishop Jo Seoka, at the opening of the organisation's annual conference in Johannesburg today.

In a keynote address on the theme of the conference, Bishop Seoka asked how mining had impacted on communities during the past year and whether communities had benefited from it.

“Can we speak of signs of a new dawn, or indeed of any glimmer of early morning light for people whose lives have been impoverished by mining activity, and who remain desperately poor in spite of the riches being extracted from the land on which they once lived?” Bishop Seoka asked.

He added: “Sadly, I conclude that, with rare exceptions, there are no such signs at mining impacted community level. The impoverishment of communities is at an all-time high, with their way of life and dignity all but destroyed. Communities and their leaders continue to be marginalised in decision-making, and the power relations between mining companies and communities remain grossly skewed. We now talk about traumatised communities.”

He noted that 2018 had seen the sixth anniversary of the Marikana massacre in 2012.

“What is most striking about the Marikana anniversary is the fact that there is still no redress for victims and their families. Families are still forlornly waiting for an apology. Widows have not received compensation, and, worse still, suicides in the community related to the massacre have increased. Although affected families agreed to a settlement, out of sheer desperation, months have passed without payment being made. Justice delayed is justice denied. The wheels of government

turn slowly, but for these families, the daily pain of the massacre stares them in their faces,” he said.

Turning to major developments in the mining industry in the past year, Bishop Seoka noted the appointment of Gwede Mantashe as Minister of Mineral Resources, the release of the third draft of the Mining Charter, and the election of Cyril Ramaphosa as new ANC leader and President of the country.

“The appointment of Mr. Mantashe was welcomed by the Bench Marks Foundation. We saw him as someone who may be able to fully grasp the industry and its impacts and listen to the voice of civil society and communities’ concerns... However, our positive view turned to deep disappointment at Mr. Mantashe’s handling of a meeting he called to discuss mining at Xolobeni on the Wild Coast. The minister effectively shut out the genuine leaders and silenced the voices of those who stand to lose most from mining. This is not the kind of action we expect from a representative of our democratically elected government! I will not be exaggerating if I say he has proved us wrong to have thought he will be better than his predecessor.”

Bishop Seoka said he and Bench Marks Foundation saw little benefit in the Mining Charter for communities.

“Talk about trust funds is meaningless for communities. We all know that communities simply don’t trust tribal and local authorities to deal with trusts in a way that benefits the people they are intended for. So, as far as the Mining Charter is concerned, it has really been a non-event for mining communities this year,” he said.

## **ENDS**

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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