



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Speak against mining at your own peril

11 February 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

People who speak against the devastation experienced by mining in their communities do so with a very real threat to their lives, says the Bench Marks Foundation.

Speaking at the Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) taking place in Cape Town from 9 – 12 February 2015, a community member told the large crowd gathered at the Upper Eastside Hotel in Woodstock, Cape Town, that his house had been severely damaged while he attended the Indaba.

The reason behind this destruction is directly related to his work for the community about the impacts of mining and his (and others') call for the public protector to investigate maladministration in his area.

“Throughout our work with communities, we have come across many people who have been victimised and have suffered abuse as a result of their activism against mining,” says David van Wyk, lead researcher for the Bench Marks Foundation.

“In a study we conducted on Iron, which will be released later this year, we have quite a few examples of this. One such example is a man who was thrown off a three-story truck because he spoke up against mining.

“I also recall an incident in the Philippines where a photograph was taken of a group of activists. Each person in that photograph was assassinated shortly thereafter.

“This is a shocking reality for those who stand up against companies that wreak havoc in their communities. It shouldn't have happened there and we certainly cannot let that happen anywhere else in the world, let alone in Africa!

“We have reported before, in our policy gap series, how communities are often harassed by security companies working for mines and how the police are biased towards the mining companies.

“Other forms of intimidation and violence have also been reported during the AMI,” says van Wyk.

“A representative from Angola spoke about the collusion between mining houses and government and how restrictive the environment is for civil society interventions especially with regard to severe abuse that women endure in communities around the mines.

“This is unfortunately a common story all over Africa,” says van Wyk. “A very strong and telling statement came out today: thanks to the scramble for Africa's resources, instead of the continent being the cradle of humankind, it has become the hell for humankind”.

To push the organisation's messages around victimisation, intimidation and the need for an independent fund and recourse to justice for communities, the Bench Marks Foundation will drive around Cape Town in a bus displaying banners with various messages on 11 February 2015. Bishop Jo Seoka will lead the action which will end at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) where the Mining Indaba is taking place.

In addition, there will be an exhibition on the bus. Theatrical exhibits related to mining will also take place in various areas around and outside of the CTICC once the bus arrives.

The AMI provides an international platform for all interested stakeholders to share experiences, mobilise and motivate mining communities to strengthen their work on advocacy for environmentally and human rights conscious natural resource governance, develop strategic tools that will empower Africa's citizens to meaningfully participate in natural resource governance, facilitate and foster better engagement between mining communities, governments and mining companies, facilitate and foster better engagement between mining communities, governments and mining companies and to provide a voice to the experiences of communities affected by mining. More than 60 organisations from around the world form part of the AMI and over 300 people from 37 countries are attending the 6th Annual AMI this year.

The event is convened by the Economic Justice Network of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa, the Bench Marks Foundation, Norwegian Church Aid, Oxfam America, Open Society Foundation, the Southern Africa Resource Watch, among others.

For more information on the AMI, email alternativeminingindaba2015@gmail.com.

Follow the indaba on Twitter: @AltMiningIndaba and on <http://alternativeminingindaba.blogspot.com/>.

For more information on the Bench Marks Foundation, go to www.bench-marks.org.za.

ENDS

Invitation to media:

Members of the media are invited to accompany the Bench Marks Foundation on 11 February 2015 on a bus ride from Upper Eastside Hotel in Woodstock, Cape Town which will travel around the city on its journey to the International Convention Centre where the organisation will scale up its response to the exclusion of civil society and community members at the Mining Indaba and the injustices and exploitation experienced through mining.

The bus will depart from Upper Eastside Hotel at 11h45 and will arrive at the CTICC at 12h45. Please note that space will be limited on the bus, so email info@quo-vadis.co.za to book your seat.

About Bench Marks Foundation:

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 by the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka who chairs the organisation and by member churches of the SACC in 2001.

Alternative Mining Indaba Contact details:	
Bench Marks Foundation Contact:	Economic Justice Network
Mr John Capel, Executive Director 011 832 1743 or 082 870 8861 Email: jcapel@eject.co.za	Rev Malcolm Damon ED of Economic Justice Network 021 424 9563 Email: admin@ejn.org.za @malcolm_ejn