

Media Statement by The Bench Marks Foundation

BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION, WARNS AGAINST ANOTHER COP-OUT, IF THE ROLE OF CORPORATIONS IS NOT FIRMLY ADDRESSED

For immediate release

Bishop Jo Seoka, chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation, has warned that if richer countries - where most of the world's most powerful Transnational Corporations are located - do not submit themselves to a "just solution" to crisis of the climate, poverty and inequality, they would be leading us to "Armageddon". But for the bishop, looking at Europe and America is only a start, as most of these corporations have their tentacles in Africa, including South Africa, where they apply sub-human standards in the extractive industries.

The Bench Marks Foundation has studied the impacts on mining on the environment, and argues it may be the right time to engage in "national dialogue and soul searching" about a national development path that is not so mining dependent. Mining contributes to environmental and water abuse and fails to deliver on the promises made to communities, the environment and livelihoods.

"Our research has shown that some of the corporations emit hazardous waste (air and water) in the shadow of darkness, and where they do this in daylight, do so – with weak regulation and impunity. In addition," insists Bishop Seoka, "tailings dams with high levels of uranium and other heavy metals are located within 75 meters of the nearest residential flats in Reigerpark. Riverlea is located in the shadows of two major tailings facilities and Soweto is skirted with tailings dams on its perimeter. During the windy season, radioactive poisonous tailings dust blow into the streets and households of all these communities.

"There is a strong correlation between the location of mine waste and the location of poor communities, a heritage of Apartheid which the current government seems happy to perpetuate when we note the location of tailings and mine waste facilities in close proximity to poor communities in the North West province and Limpopo."

The research conducted by the BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION shows that there are in South Africa, close to 6 000 abandoned mines, many coal, that were not properly closed and rehabilitated. We believe that the corporations must not ask tax payers to come and bail them out again, and must be made to pay for their environmental degradation.

"It seems that mining law in this country, trumps all other laws, and this must be addressed." Bishop Jo Seoka adds that for years the mining regime has ignored communities seeking to only accommodate *organised labour* and government.

"These communities suffer the worse abuses but are excluded from having a voice," he said.

"We have heard communities cry out for the right to choose developmental paths that respect their ancestors, and are clean, but these get pushed aside by bureaucracy, the *moneyed* people and even government. This is undemocratic, and must be stopped," he says. "The leading mining law - the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) - excludes communities from making contributions to its amendments but it is us, God's children, who must breathe the rotten air that surrounds the mines. We will take this to the Public Protector. We are also studying why we are excluded from the Social and Labour Plans, which are a product of organised labour, capital and government, but with devastating impact on communities."

We repeat our call is an age old one: **NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US!**

Whilst Bishop Jo Seoka wishes the parties well, he warns that this is not a time for green-washing but for vigilance as the struggle is a long process and not an event. "If corporations, and the government, really believe that God created the earth in his image, there is much work to be done. Honestly and justly. Let COP 17 be a time for rededication to this project of hard work."

ENDS

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the focus on social sustainability and economic empowerment. The organisation encourages CSR that goes beyond reporting mechanisms and focuses on the gap between policy and practice, thereby assisting civil society groups and corporations to move beyond philanthropy to more strategic interventions that benefit both the corporations and society. Central to Bench Marks' agenda is how CSR is integrated into companies' operations and ensuring that it is at the core of every decision making process.

For more information, contact:

John Capel, Executive Director of the Bench Marks Foundation [082 874 2650](tel:0828742650)

Bishop Jo Seoka, Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation [082 893 1370](tel:0828931370)

Bench Marks Website: <http://www.bench-marks.org.za>