



MEDIA STATEMENT BY BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION

Eating and breathing pollution

Monday, 15th August 2011

For immediate release

South Africa's steelmaker, ArcelorMittal, is slowly killing the future of many young people in the Joko Tea and Bophelong Townships in Vanderbijlpark, with the fumes produced by its Vanderbijlpark Works plant.

Residents living in these areas are constantly complaining about emissions and the black dust they inhale which comes from Vanderbijlpark Works, so says John Capel, Executive Director at Bench Marks Foundation.

"ArcelorMittal built its plant in this community without sufficiently and transparently negotiating with the residents first to explain what its plan was," said Capel. "Now the company is making money at the expense of these community member's lives."

While the company fails to offer enough jobs to members of the surrounding communities, the fumes produced by its Vanderbijlpark Works plant leave the residents with sicknesses such as asthma, sinusitis and skin and eye irritations.

Thanks to Bench Marks' Monitoring Action Project, the community members are now able to examine and report on the outcomes of such industrial operations in their areas.

Established in 2009, the Monitoring Action Project is a Bench Marks Foundation initiative aimed at monitoring the various effects industries have in the lives of community members and environment.

"Industrial operations, such as mining and chemical extraction industries located close to poor communities, have put the health of residents at risk," said Brown Motsau, Programme Manager at Bench Marks Foundation.

To fight such business conduct, Bench Marks trains a number of disadvantaged young people around South Africa, providing them with the skills they need in order to monitor the impact industrial operations have on the community.

So far, Bench Marks Foundation has trained more than 60 "monitors" over the past three years from different areas around Southern Africa. The writing and computer skills they have acquired through the training received, has enabled them to observe and document problems faced by their communities.

The monitors are nominated by local community groups working in the areas where these young people live.

“We believe that there is a need to come up with ways in which to make operations, such as those run by ArcelorMittal, advantageous for all, not just for the shareholders,” Capel added.
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“Our aim is to ensure that the operations of big corporations do not, in any way, undermine community life and destroy the environment. This project is doing just that.”

The monitors’ writings and progress reports on the project are available on the website:
<https://sites.google.com/site/monitoringaction>.

The Bench Marks Foundation was launched in 2001 by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in response to the churches’ call in 1993 to monitor and hold businesses accountable in the new South Africa and in Southern Africa. It is chaired by Bishop Jo Seoka.

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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.

Issued by Quo Vadis Communications on behalf of the Bench Marks Foundation

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