



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Mine security companies a law unto themselves

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Attacks by mining security companies on community members and others are natural phenomena in South Africa, as witnessed first-hand by a team from the Bench Marks Foundation earlier this month while doing research for its latest report on Coal of Africa's (CoAL) Makhado mine in South Africa's Limpopo Province.

The team, led by the organisation's lead researcher, David van Wyk, together with researchers from Switzerland, were attacked by the mine's security after a visit to the neighbouring community.

"We were on a public road," said van Wyk. "We weren't trespassing and we certainly weren't doing anything that could have warranted interference by the security.

"They were hostile and threatened us verbally and were quite physical. They kept telling us we are breaking rules and laws and couldn't tell us exactly what the law was they were referring to.

"We were on public property, not on the mine's property."

Van Wyk says that this is normal behaviour given Bench Marks' experience in speaking to community members, not only of this mine, but from many of the other mines the organisation has involved with. Mine security regularly threatens both community members as well as any person that the security guards think may be a 'threat' to the mine, he says.

"Community members are regularly threatened, both physically and verbally. We recall the role of mine security during the Marikana strikes three years ago.

"We have received reports of security guards even going into homes and intimidating people".

The Bench Marks Foundation says, given its vast experience working with communities all over South Africa, involving the police in matters such as this is totally useless.

"In fact," says van Wyk, "the police are often so 'pro' the mine that they encourage the security in its militaristic ways and work with them".

"It's time that this practice stops. The mine's security only has jurisdiction over the mine's property, nowhere else. There should be an investigation into the police too. This corruption must end so that the rights of the community members can be upheld".

The research report is titled "Vitol and coal trading: Challenges of human rights due diligence in the supply chain", and is a first of its kind case study assessing the human rights approach of Switzerland's largest company by turnover, as well as one of the world's top five coal traders, Vitol, and one of its suppliers, Coal of Africa Limited.

The report is the product of the joint work of the research teams from the Bench Marks Foundation and Swiss-based Bread for All. A coalition of 70 organisations has been formed to support the Initiative for Responsible Multinational Corporations. This initiative requires every multinational company to conduct human rights due diligence.

The Bench Marks Foundation monitors multinational corporations operation in Southern Africa and the rest of the African continent to ensure that they meet minimum social, environmental and economic standards and promotes an ethical and critical voice on what constitutes corporate social responsibility.

“Vitol and coal trading: Challenges of human rights due diligence in the supply chain” is one of eleven other reports by the organisation highlighting corporate social responsibility issues in various corporations.

Go to www.bench-marks.org.za to access these reports and for more information on the Bench Marks Foundation.

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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.

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About Bread for All:

Bread for all is the development service of the protestant churches in Switzerland. It empowers people in Asia, Latin America and Africa to free themselves from poverty and dependency and it motivates people in the North to commit to a fairer world.

The organisation empowers people to build sustainable livelihoods through over 350 development projects and programmes in 50 countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa; informs and provides educational services about development policy issues for the public at large in Switzerland; advocates for international social, political and economic structures that provides the framework for a fair and sustainable development process worldwide and raises financial resources for development projects and programmes and provides monitoring and evaluation, based on defined quality criteria.