



## Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

### **Mining Indabas urged: Call for release of civil society delegation**

Johannesburg, Sunday 5 February 2017

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The Bench Marks Foundation has called for the release of members of a Tanzanian fact-finding mission who were arrested in northern Malawi in December last year, and are still being held in detention.

The call was made on the eve of the influential Investing in African Mining Indaba and Alternative Mining Indaba, starting tomorrow [Monday 6 February] in Cape Town.

Bench Marks Executive Director, John Capel, said both Indabas had a responsibility to make their voices heard in calling for the release of the Tanzanian delegation and asked them to send a letter of protest to the Malawian High Commission in Pretoria.

Capel says that the fact-finding mission was concerned with the social and environmental impacts of the uranium mining.

The civil society delegation from Tanzania visited the Kayelekera uranium mining complex in northern Malawi in December, but its members were arrested on 22 December as spies and have been jailed ever since. The accusations range from trespass to being members of a foreign organisation.

The mine, run by the Australian-based company, Paladin, no longer operates due to the diminishing price of uranium and the costs of mining it. It is Malawi's only mine and was the biggest foreign investment in the country's history.

"We are highly perturbed at the conditions under which the delegation is being held, as has been reported to us by the African Uranium Alliance, the way they are being represented on trial, and the various violations of their legal and human rights.

"In South Africa, we have experienced over a century-and-a-half of mining and in the process have gradually strengthened and defended the rights of communities affected by mining to have full information about the impacts of mining on their socio-economic and environmental rights.

"As co-citizens of SADC, we feel the same rights should apply to Tanzanians who sought to establish how mining in Malawi operated, and to get insight about what to expect in their own country. Instead of acting in the spirit of co-operation and freedom of information, the Malawian authorities have acted defensively and unnecessarily high-handedly.

“We therefore urge the government of the Republic of Malawi to release the Tanzanian detainees immediately. We urge the government to co-operate with its Tanzanian counterparts in returning the detainees to their country.

“We further urge the government to provide full disclosure on the impacts of uranium mining at Kayelekera to any citizens of the SADC region who have a valid interest in the information. We demand urgent action on these questions,” Capel said.

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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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