



## Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

### Charter discussions do not augur well

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#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The exclusion of community representatives from the inaugural discussion about the mining charter that took place over the past weekend does not augur well for the charter's future, says Bench Marks Foundation.

Executive Director, John Capel, commenting on the start of negotiations about the charter, says: "We are not encouraged by this start. Minister Gwede Mantashe should know from his vast experience in both mining and politics that he cannot possibly build consensus among all stakeholders about this charter if he excludes communities in such important discussions. Such an approach is guaranteed to be stillborn.

"We call on the minister to urgently convene meetings with organised community formations that exist across the country so as to include them in any charter redrafting process," Capel said.

He added: "Minister Mantashe was recently asked on a TV platform how he intends to address the participation of communities. His knee jerk response was that he will visit them. There are 2500 operational mines in South Africa with 6000 abandoned mines. Just how is the new minister going to visit thousands of communities in the short space of time in which his government wants to finalise the charter redraft?"

Capel pointed out that there are number of organised communities and networks representing communities and many civil society organisations who work with communities. He said the minister should become aware of them and engage them as a starting point in the dialogue.

"There are at least three community protests every day around mining issues, according to the Chamber of Mines. Yet the minister seems to be ignoring this and, like his predecessors, bypassing one of the most important stakeholder groups – communities.

"Communities bear the brunt of mining activities suffering livelihood loss, forced removals, health and safety impacts, water and air contamination, yet they are excluded," he said.

Capel warned that communities are unlikely to sit idly by while important decisions that directly impact them are made.

"The motto of communities is: Nothing about us without us," he said.

He concluded: "We hope the new minister will be progressive in his attitude and address these issues and develop a relationship with civil society and mining communities to counter the enormous cost on people around mining. If he fails to include the excluded, he opens the way to more protest actions, and the backlash of violence by private security and the police."

ENDS

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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