



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Communities suffering as a result of environmental pollution by Shiva Uranium

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Community members from Dominionville in Klerksdorp in the North West Province of South Africa are suffering from an increase in respiratory diseases caused by dust from Shiva Uranium's tailings dams, says Bench Marks Foundation's community monitors.

According to the monitors, the mine, which is effectively owned by the Gupta family with a 74% stake through Oakbay Resources (the family owns 64% of Oakbay) and Duduzane Zuma, President Jacob Zuma's son, who has a stake in the company, does not seem to regard the tailings dams as a danger and does not take any actions toward minimising the damage to the community.

Tailings dams consist of water contaminated with acid, unwanted minerals and leftover uranium and comprise most of the radioactive properties associated with mining this resource. The sludge in a tailings dam continues to release radon, a radioactive, colourless, odourless and tasteless noble gas that occurs naturally as a decay product of radium. Dust on tailings dams contains these radioactive constituents and radon gas.

"We are continuously breathing in this radioactive dust," says Tshepo Mmusi, community monitor for the Bench Marks Foundation.

"This dust is everywhere, it's on our clothes, on the surfaces in our homes and settles on our food, which we can't even clean properly because we have no water".

In addition to the increase in respiratory diseases, the monitors have recorded a severe reduction in water supply to the community which has resulted in a school closing down and children having to travel 40 kilometres to the next school. Uranium mining uses copious amounts of water.

In a move to absolve it from liability or actions, the mine is pushing for the community to relocate by claiming that the area is highly radioactive and is not suitable for human settlement. But the nearby white community has not been pushed into doing so.

Community members together with the Bench Marks community monitors and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission have called for the local government to address the challenges the community is experiencing and have made it clear that they do not want to relocate but want Shiva Uranium to take responsibility for its actions and clean up the environment.

Relocation would mean taking the community away from their cultural heritage and forcing them to leave their ancestor's graves. Information has not been forthcoming as to where they will be relocated to and whether the community will be any better off than they are now.

Says Mmusi: "Why should we leave our home because the mine shirks its legal responsibility? Our lives are here. Our ancestors are buried here".

Community members of towns such as Dominionville are trained by the Bench Marks Foundation to monitor private corporations, such as mines and government, to ensure that they are acting in an accountable and socially responsible way and to share their findings through community meetings, blogging and other social media tools. The

monitors form groups which work together to submit grievances and memoranda of demands to companies and governments on behalf of communities.

The Bench Marks Foundation is an organisation that monitors multinational corporations to ensure that they meet minimum social, environmental and economic standards and promotes an ethical and critical voice on what constitutes corporate social responsibility.

For more information on the Bench Marks Foundation, go to www.bench-marks.org.za.

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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 by the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka who chairs the organisation and by member churches of the SACC in 2001.

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