



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

DMR CALLED TO LEGITIMISE “ZAMA ZAMA” MINING

Johannesburg, Wednesday 29 March 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

As minerals such as gold become depleted in South Africa, the country needs to formalise and legitimise “zama zama” or survivalist mining, the Bench Marks Foundation today told the Deputy Minister of Mineral Resources, Mr Godfrey Oliphant.

The Bench Marks delegation, led by its chairperson Bishop Jo Seoka, told the Deputy Minister that it was time to begin an orderly, sensible and safe transition from large scale industrial mining to small scale artisanal mining of the kind that zama zamas practise.

The delegation said that with the will and commitment of government, it was possible to formalise and legitimise small scale mining.

“As minerals become depleted, industrial mining will decline, while artisanal mining will increase. As industrial mining for gold, for example, declines, artisanal mining for it in abandoned, ownerless and derelict mines is on the rise,” the delegation said.

Bench Marks Foundation estimates that there are currently 30 000 artisanal “illegal” zama zama miners in Gauteng alone.

Assuming that there is a dependency ratio of 1:8 for every zama zama, this means that 250 000 people survive on their work for their housing, school fees, food, clothes, etc.

Shutting down artisanal/survivalist mining would mean leaving these people without any means of survival which in turn would have a negative impact on violent crime and the economy.

“We are aware that the Department of Mineral Resources has a small-scale mining support unit. However, we note that it does not really cater for survivalist mining, in which the zama zamas are involved,” Bench Marks said.

The Foundation suggested several steps that could be taken by the DMR to formalise this small-scale form of mining, including:

- Prosecuting the industrial corporations and making them pay for the mess they leave behind;
- Doing a proper census of all the abandoned mines and communities living informally on these properties;
- Doing an audit of all the zama zamas and registering them;
- Getting the Department of Home Affairs to sort out their papers;

- Organising the zama zamas into legal business entities such as cooperatives and training them;
- Clustering these operations into units and assign an engineer and health and safety officer to each cluster;
- Creating a central buying agency to purchase the gold from these small operators at market value;
- Doing regular health and safety inspections;
- Creating a supply chain for these operators; and
- Shutting down the scrap metal dealers, the syndicates, sponsors and other “vultures” currently associated with illegal operations.

Bench Marks Foundation added that the DMR’s portrayal of zama zamas as “illegal foreign nationals” could lead to xenophobic violence.

“It should be remembered that the mining industry caused governments from the 1860s to force people as far afield as Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique and Lesotho off their land and into the mines as cheap labour.

“It is a tragic irony that subsequent generations of these people on which this industry was founded are now being forced off the land, regarded as illegal and are no longer welcome,” Bench Marks said.

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.

Bench Marks Foundation contact:	Bench Marks Foundation media contact
Mr John Capel Executive Director 011 832 1743 or 082 870 8861 Email: jcapel@eject.co.za	Ruth Coggin 082 903 5819 Email: ruth@quo-vadis.co.za