



## Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

### Gap is as wide as ever

Cape Town, Monday 6 February 2017

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The suggestion that the gap between mining companies and communities impacted by them is not as wide as perceived is absurd, according to the Executive Director of the Bench Marks Foundation, John Capel.

He was responding to claim made by the CEO of the International Council on Mining and Metals, Mr Tom Butler, during a panel discussion at the Alternative Mining Indaba in Cape Town today.

Butler said that a roundtable discussion at the parallel Mining Indaba yesterday involving the mining industry and government had identified a breakdown of trust and a lack of common vision among all stakeholders as being the number one theme.

In response, Capel said: "The fact that civil society was absent from yesterday's Mining Indaba roundtable is indicative of the huge gap that still exists between the mining industry and communities. How anyone can claim that this gap has narrowed in the face of the omission of community representatives, as was the case yesterday at the Mining Indaba, is beyond comprehension. And their absence yesterday does not even begin to look at the reality on the ground."

Capel added that industry's Mining Indaba had no intention of actually ever dealing with communities, who it regarded at best as an irritant.

Apart from yesterday's roundtable, Capel said that ten years of Bench Marks Foundation's Policy Gap series had shown little evidence of the closing of gaps.

"We released our first Policy Gap, on the platinum belt, in 2006. When we went back in 2012 to look at it again, the situation had got worse.

"It is one thing to read and listen to the "fake news" or fiction from large mining corporates with generous publicity budgets. It is quite another to interact directly with the communities affected, and witness at first hand the negative impact of mining on the lives of community members, as we do all the time," Capel said.

Capel added that the Bench Marks Foundation has developed community monitoring schools to enable communities to talk and take action for themselves.

"The Tom Butlers of the world can tell us about how mining companies are "searching" or "thinking" about how they interact with communities – but all we continue to see is huge destruction in the wake of mining, and it's always communities that suffer.

“Bringing in communities only at the end is not going to get us anywhere. We need fundamental change,” Capel said.

During the panel discussion, Butler said there was a need to initiate a dialogue involving all stakeholders about how a country’s natural resources are going to be developed, and both the benefits and the impact of mining.

Some countries in South America, for example, had completely banned mining activity following such a debate. However, this level of debate had yet to happen in Africa.

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.

<b>Bench Marks Foundation contact:</b>	<b>Bench Marks Foundation media contact</b>
Mr John Capel Executive Director 011 832 1743 or 082 870 8861 Email: <a href="mailto:jcapel@eject.co.za">jcapel@eject.co.za</a>	Ruth Coggin 082 903 5819 Email: <a href="mailto:ruth@quo-vadis.co.za">ruth@quo-vadis.co.za</a>