



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Platinum consumer giant urged to act responsibly

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Trade unions, miners and NGOs have again demanded that the biggest consumer of platinum in the world pressurise South African mine Lonmin to adequately improve living and working conditions of workers in the platinum belt.

Bishop Jo Seoka, Chairperson of Bench Marks Foundation, was part of a delegation that addressed the annual general meeting of BASF in Germany earlier this month.

He was accompanied by miner and community member Mzoxolo Magidiwana, who was severely injured during the massacre on 16 August 2012, and Joseph Mathunjwa, president of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), the biggest union in South Africa's platinum belt.

The Bench Marks Foundation also called on BASF shareholders to compensate the victims of the Marikana massacre.

"We believe that had BASF done proper human rights due diligence as a signatory to the UN Principles on Business and Human Rights, that perhaps this massacre would not have occurred. These principles state that states must protect human rights and corporations must respect, and there must be access to remedy," it said.

A similar demand was made of shareholders at Lonmin's AGM in London in January this year.

Bishop Seoka told shareholders of BASF that the group's demand was not about charity, but a question of justice: "We are not here as supplicants or beggars. This is about the workers' dignity and integrity of creation, and your credibility as a company that prides itself on its ethical and social responsibility practices.

"We are appealing to your consciences to show a gesture of goodwill and what we request from you now is a clear and unqualified indication of your willingness to contributing to sustainable development in Marikana," he said.

Mathunjwa told shareholders on behalf of AMCU that BASF should shift from its lip service of its oft-touted claim of "responsibility along the supply chain" to concrete action.

"You, BASF, as the most powerful enterprise in the platinum business, could support AMCU in this matter. Your corporate identity, claiming that you combine 'economic success' with 'social responsibility', gives you no other option."

Magidiwana’s speech to shareholders was equally hard-hitting: “Even as we speak today, the majority of the people that work at Lonmin live in tin shacks that are infected with rats. There is no running water in the households, just one tap for a lot of families. Not all the areas have electricity and toilets are shared ones and just dug in the ground with no chemical treatment of human waste.

“Under these conditions, a life in dignity is not possible. It is my understanding that BASF is buying platinum from Lonmin for millions of Euros per month. I therefore believe that what we, the workers, are asking for is not unreasonable. We know that the management of Lonmin and BASF is making huge profits. We know that we dig out one of the most precious metals on earth. We just want to live in dignity. I cannot see that this wish is unreasonable,” he said.

This is the third BASF AGM that has been lobbied to take action on behalf of Marikana victims. The campaign is organised by “Plough back the fruits”, a campaigning network of activist organisations, including Bench Marks Foundation, in South Africa and Europe. Its aim is to confront Lonmin and BASF with the reality of mining and living in Marikana and in the platinum belt of South Africa and demand the immediate and sustainable improvement of living and working conditions for mine workers, their families and their communities.

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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