



## Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

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### Sign of hope from ICC – but SA has withdrawn

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#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The decision by the International Criminal Court (ICC) that company executives, politicians and other actors can be tried for land grabbing and environmental destruction is a sign of hope in the age of mining impunity – but any hope of ordinary South Africans benefitting from this has been dashed by the government's decision to withdraw from this body.

This irony became clear from a speech made by Ms Masego Madzwamuse of the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA). The ICC pronouncement was one of the signs of hope highlighted by Ms Madzwamuse when she spoke at a two-day conference organised by the Bench Marks Foundation in Braamfontein, Johannesburg.

Another sign of hope had come from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) which recently passed a resolution on no-go areas for mining and other commercial activities in world heritage sites and other protected areas, following intense lobbying efforts from indigenous peoples and local communities across the world.

The International Council on Mining and Metals had also recently renewed its commitment not to mine in world heritage sites, Ms Madzwamuse added.

In spite of this commitment, she said, mining developments are taking place in Mapungugwe in the Limpopo Province which is threatening a world heritage site.

In addition, the ICMM's sustainable development framework is being selectively applied, depending on legislation of the host country.

The impression that environmental impact assessments (EIAs) are an obstruction still persists, and governments often assists industries to go around them.

Most of the EIA guidelines are outdated and in need of revision to take emerging knowledge and approaches into account, she said.

EIAs should not just be used as a "green" tool, but embraced and used to help meet critical priorities such as sustainable development.

Ms Madzwamuse called for the introduction of innovative tools to assist communities in their battle against mining. An example could be the formation of multi-stakeholder forums such as citizen councils that would sit side-by-side with mining chambers and have the same weight as business forums.

Other strategies could include getting parliamentarians to take an active role in monitoring the implementation of EIAs and environmental policies.

Communities all over the continent needed to connect with each other in the struggle against mining deprivation, she added.

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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