



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Australian Commissioner to take Bench Marks' concerns to Australian Government

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - 15 April 2016

On 14 April 2016, a Bench Marks Foundation delegation led by Rt Rev Bishop Jo Seoka, chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation, Mr John Capel, Bench Marks' Executive director, and Hassen Lorgat, Chief Strategist for the Bench Marks Foundation, met with Australian High Commissioner Mr Adam McCarthy to express outrage at the killings of mining activists, in particular that of Siphosiphu Bazooka Rhadebe, a leader of the Amadiba Crisis Committee, which has led the fight against mining for over a dozen years, until his untimely and cruel death by unknown assailants on the 22 March 2016.

The recent spate of intimidation of the Umgungundlovu Community, falling under the Amadiba Crisis Committee's area, followed the application for mining rights by Mineral Resource Commodities and its Black Economic Empowerment partner Transworld Energy (TEM). MRC is an Australian mining company.

"We expect that Australian companies abide by the highest standards of human rights, transparency and accountability," Bishop Jo was quoted as saying.

The delegation insisted that the corporations abide by the principles of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of directly impacted upon communities and not those 60 odd kilometers away. MRC say communities have accepted mining but it's clear that the nearby impacted communities have not accepted it.

The delegation emphasized the right of the community to say NO to Mining as they are committed to preserving their way of life and culture. Eco-tourism was touted as a viable alternative to destructive mining and in any case the present agricultural activities of the community sustain them. This cannot be ignored.

Bishop Jo also told the ambassador that the public pronouncements by Mark Caruso were inflammatory and boarded on hate speech and in the process also undermined the Australian people.

"We will be formally complaining to the Human Rights Commission about these violent outbursts which we believe contribute to a climate of hate and violence instead of contributing towards inclusive and people-centered development".

Adam McCarthy said that he would take the delegation's concerns to his government for their attention. Furthermore, in response to the Bench Marks' demand to "provide all support to the South African police that would enable them to fully investigate those behind the killings of anti mining activists", he replied that this could be considered if the approach was made through the South African government.

The Bench Marks were however told that if the company was involved in bribery or corruption it could lodge a complaint with the Australian Justice department.

Finally, the ambassador found no contradiction in his role to accede to the Foundation's demand that they join the Foundation in "keeping a watching brief on the human rights violations in the affected community" that was opposing mining.

The meeting ended amicably after Bishop Seoka pointed out that he hoped to see the Minister of Mineral Resources, Mosebenzi Joseph Zwane, about the rights of communities negatively impacted by mining and the right of communities to say “No” to Mining.

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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