



Media Statement by Bench Marks Foundation on behalf of the Alternative Mining Indaba

Women are still marginalised in mining

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For immediate release

Women are still a minority in the mining sector, and particularly in the lower paid categories. This imbalance creates conditions for sexual harassment and exploitation, and very little has been done to change the macho culture operating within the closed environment of a mine, says the Bench Marks Foundation.

Although a few mines have exceeded the target set by the Mining Charter – 10% of the workforce should be women – they still make up an insignificant minority and are usually deployed as supplementary rather than core labour.

Ahead of International Women’s Day, celebrated annually on 8 March, John Capel, Executive Director of the Bench Marks Foundation, acknowledges the progress mines have made in employing women, but stresses that he is still concerned about the conditions under which these women work, the inequality that exists in the mining sector and the need for further sustainable change.

“Even though we have highlighted these issues in our various research reports on the social, economic and environmental performances of mines, the first of which was released in 2007,” says Capel. “We still receive reports of a lack of facilities for women in some mines.

“We find that women are still subjected to sharing changing rooms where they often find themselves the objects of sexual ridicule and harassment. The lack of adequate underground toilets also continues to be an issue.”

Capel said that social justice is essential in this sector.

“Gender equality in mining needs to be promoted more vigorously. The barriers women face within the sector need to be removed and mining corporations should view this issue as more than just a compliance exercise that requires the achievement of a target number.

“Corporations need to regularly do an internal audit of the conditions for women. They need to assess whether the right facilities, policies and services are in place for them, whether there are mechanisms in place to provide women with social support, whether there are any salary disparities and what barriers are negatively affecting women’s participation within the company.

“It is also essential that the definition of sexual harassment be clearly defined together with the complaint procedures and the consequences thereof. This should be continuously communicated to all within the mine.”

In addition, Capel said that the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities as well as the Department of Labour should regularly investigate the conditions for women at mines throughout the country.

“Despite legislation relating to the increase of women in mining, enforcement of the legal requirements is scant,” says Capel. “The patriarchal culture in mining persists and women continue to feel marginalised.”

To access the Bench Mark Foundation’s research reports, go to www.bench-marks.org.za or contact the Bench Marks Foundation on 011 832 1743.

Notes to editors:

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.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu launched the Foundation in 2001 and the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka chairs the organisation.

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