



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Covid-19 approach has been “a disaster” says Bench Marks Chair

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The approach of the South African government in dealing with Covid-19 has been nothing short of a disaster, in spite of the warm applause it has received by the World Health Organisation.

This is the view of the Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation, Revd Dr Jo Seoka, when he opened the organisation’s annual conference this week. The conference was held virtually as a result of Covid-19.

Dr Seoka took government to task for its “dismal” testing and “lack of full transparency and accountability about what is really happening on the coal face”.

He added that deaths have also not been properly accounted for as the national tally of unnatural deaths the country is experiencing are estimated by some scientists to be closer to 42 000 and not the 17 000 plus reported.

“The reason for this is that unlike other countries, we do not include in our statistics the increased death rate beyond the common causes. We talk of recovery rates of 89%, without giving facts. Our understanding is that recovery means one did not die, but we know those who survive live with heart problems and lung hardening diseases which cause breathing difficulties,” he added.

Dr Seoka told the conference that the pandemic had shown that, even in South Africa’s constitutional democracy, black lives did not matter.

“Mr Collins Khoza, who was beaten to death by the police outside his small shack in Alexander, tells a lot about the attitude of the government towards black people.

“Of course, government had an opportunity to gain community support if only it had acted in a democratic and participatory manner. It could have involved community organisations in awareness campaigns, dealt with small businesses differently. Instead it went for a complete lockdown, where this was more needed in the mining sector and other densely population industries.”

The Bench Marks’ Chairperson also noted that much of government relief during Covid-19 had gone to big business who could afford losses in profits for the good of the country.

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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 in 2001 by the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka who chairs the organisation and by member churches of the SACC.

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