



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Monday 19 October 2020

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MINING COMMUNITIES TO TAKE CENTRE STAGE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The multiple challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in deeper recession and ongoing systemic repression of the poor and working classes.

This is one of the themes that will be explored by the Bench Marks Foundation at its annual conference tomorrow, Tuesday 20 October. In keeping with many other organisations, the conference will be held virtually, and will hear from representatives of mining communities who have organised to tell their stories of mining degradation and exploitation themselves.

Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation, Bishop Jo Seoka, said on the eve of the conference: “Elite control over wealth is unsustainable and the struggle to democratise the economy is long overdue.”

He added: “The Bench Marks Foundation and its partner organisations and the communities we work with have not remained silent. Communities are raising their voices against these abuses of power, mal-governance and ineffective regulation of corporations, particularly those in the mining sector. This pandemic for the mining communities is really a crisis upon a crisis.

“The illnesses, hunger, lack of rights in particular and to have a genuine say in decision making in the matters that affect their lives in institutions like the Mine Health and Safety Council (MHSC) has resulted in accidents, illnesses and deaths of workers and those living around the mines. In doing this, the corporations (with weak government enforcement) have externalised the costs of mining to the poorest people in our society. During Covid-19, these institutions have left mining communities without cover. The time for inclusion of mining communities cannot wait any longer. One more death is one too many.

“The multiple challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in deeper recession and ongoing systemic repression of the poor and working classes. We must resist the cry for small change. We have an opportunity to bring to life the centuries of resistances to injustice so that we may become human again.”

The conference will start at 10h00 on Tuesday 20 October with the opening address by Revd Dr Jo Seoka, Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation.

This will be followed by reflections of the past year by Executive Director, John Capel.

Guest speaker for the morning session will be Moema Miranda, a lay Franciscan who heads the Churches and Mining Network in Latin America. She will also represent the World Social Forum, an annual meeting of civil society organisations which explores an alternative future through the championing of counter-hegemonic globalisation.

The morning session will also hear from Bench Marks’ community monitors from Soweto, Rustenburg, Riverlea and Limpopo.

In the afternoon, speakers from Canada and the Philippines will join Bench Marks Foundation’s staff and community monitors to discuss “Organising in the time of pandemics”.

To register for the conference, please do so in advance here:

[https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fus02web.zoom.us%2Fmeeting%2Fregister%2FtZcode-hpjlIeEtBY-F4lpY6fTPe72tKZZoKt%3Ffbclid%3DIwAR3lQTYk7Qw_pJ03tLOUnAr7aljSpL-UOCZyk3H_ik5KmjI0HPQVeT9kJg&h=AT2X1mUETB8MZQTevFMeivXy8t_1AOqKpO12NZw5VuoPj6b7FM2gz2pzD_9z-oBgg-6fZPgPQOLaL-uJOwcVqcXzLtS-W9C2wKCL7kkqWEGUuiDj-kwDkHtjHWorpt0mviy0png&_tn=-UK*F&c\[0\]=AT35SNfgOt9b4uA7aNljY2FqZY13nGZ8WJUPXMiNKpv6Z8amgFqCyMyAVQnD_-nnGlnsN-nexxvWrmh9MDHRnXGMMRKjV2BwkdZmkC3rXivmMDEJmj5UP2kcvudBgChPWtmIsIXjvR_1HkYkg7WwS8fXpJuQhoWOqME1MNxLKOmlaqbyWXmnxMt88h2ZR-hlyNJ_t-Mw_73Q55QWJ5BpiVk](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fus02web.zoom.us%2Fmeeting%2Fregister%2FtZcode-hpjlIeEtBY-F4lpY6fTPe72tKZZoKt%3Ffbclid%3DIwAR3lQTYk7Qw_pJ03tLOUnAr7aljSpL-UOCZyk3H_ik5KmjI0HPQVeT9kJg&h=AT2X1mUETB8MZQTevFMeivXy8t_1AOqKpO12NZw5VuoPj6b7FM2gz2pzD_9z-oBgg-6fZPgPQOLaL-uJOwcVqcXzLtS-W9C2wKCL7kkqWEGUuiDj-kwDkHtjHWorpt0mviy0png&_tn=-UK*F&c[0]=AT35SNfgOt9b4uA7aNljY2FqZY13nGZ8WJUPXMiNKpv6Z8amgFqCyMyAVQnD_-nnGlnsN-nexxvWrmh9MDHRnXGMMRKjV2BwkdZmkC3rXivmMDEJmj5UP2kcvudBgChPWtmIsIXjvR_1HkYkg7WwS8fXpJuQhoWOqME1MNxLKOmlaqbyWXmnxMt88h2ZR-hlyNJ_t-Mw_73Q55QWJ5BpiVk)

The conference will be streamed live on Bench Marks Facebook page, <https://web.facebook.com/BenchMarksFoundation>, and there will be an opportunity to participate in the discussion and ask questions.

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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