



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Respect communities' right to say "NO"

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

South Africa's Communities' right to say no to mining and to decide on its own development must be respected and all intimidation stopped, says the Bench Marks Foundation in a memorandum handed to the Australian High Commissioner, Mr Adam McCarthy today.

The memorandum was handed over by the organisation's chairman, Bishop Jo Seoka, during a picket in front of the Australian High Commission building in Arcadia, Pretoria by the Bench Marks Foundation in support of the Amadiba Crisis Committee (a committee consisting of over 300 households and residents living in the area affected by mining by Mineral Resource Commodities).

The picket is the first action in a rolling campaign by the organisation aimed at highlighting the lack of adherence by mining companies, particularly Australian-owned Mineral Resource Commodities (MRC) and Transworld Energy's (TEM) actions in Xolobeni, situated in the Bizana Municipal area of South Africa's Eastern Cape, to the fundamental principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). FPIC is endorsed by the World Bank and United Nations.

Bishop Seoka said the Australian High Commission should also endorse this principle and use its influence to ensure that the communities' right to say "No" is upheld. He highlighted the memorandum's demands that the Australian government provide support to the police to investigate who is behind the killing of the activists who have been opposed to mining in the area as well as to join the organisation in keeping a watchful eye on human rights violations in the area in question.

The Australian High Commission was called on to ensure that all Australian corporations doing business in South Africa commit themselves to respecting human rights and the principles of FPIC. This must include the right of communities to choose development paths best suited to their and their land's needs and sustainability.

According to the Xolobeni community, the area is well-suited to tourism and the community wants to continue developing the tourism potential of this beautiful area. This is a more sustainable approach as opposed to mining which not only destroys the environment, but also has a very short-term benefit for the selected few.

"The actions by MRC and TEM and the words spoken by the executive chairman of MRC, Mark Caruso, and his brother Patrick Caruso, to the communities in the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape are deplorable," says Seoka.

"Patrick Caruso said the following during a meeting in 2007: 'there is always blood where there are these types of projects (mining) and in my [Patrick Caruso] experience, you cannot have development without blood'.

Seoka also raised Mark Caruso's remarks in an email as reported by the Sunday Times.

"Mark Caruso emailed the community the following: 'From time to time I have sought the Bible for understanding and perhaps I can direct you to Ezekiel 25.17: *And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger, those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon thee*'.

“Caruso also wrote: ‘I am enlivened by [the] opportunity to grind all resistance to my presence and the presence of MRC and [the South African subsidiary of TEM] into the animals [sic] of history as a failed campaign’.

“Already five major activists in this area have died over the last eight years for their right to say no. How many more people must die before something is done?”

Says Seoka: “The Department of Minerals and Resources have yet to show that it stands for justice and genuine people-centred development instead of get-rich-quick schemes that will destroy the ecology and livelihoods as well as the culture of communities.

“We hope that our plea to the Australian High Commission will be taken seriously and that they will come aboard to stop the blatant disregard of communities’ wellbeing”.

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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