



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Premature Opening has made Mining Communities Epicentres

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Communities around mines have become epicentres of the Covid-19 disease, in spite of the warning by the Bench Marks Foundation in May that the opening of mines was premature.

This was the stark reality painted by the Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation, Revd Dr Jo Seoka, when he opened the annual conference of the organisation, held virtually, yesterday.

Dr Seoka said the organisation had said in May that the decision to allow 50% of mine workers to go back to work at the beginning of May was premature and would leave to a wave of infections in mining affected communities.

“In North West province, infections rose to all time high of about 14 000 compared to about 200 before mines reopened, with similar figures in Limpopo by mid-August and have since gone down.

“The real issues among communities we work with is lack of testing. Sadly, many mines are not prepared to go beyond the mine gate in opening their clinics for community members for treatment.

“According to our records, communities are witnessing between three and six unexplained deaths a week. Often the industry’s response has been to shift responsibility to local government and not itself. This is problematic as mining does not stop at the fence of the mine and migrant labour is a big spreader of infection,” he said.

Dr Seoka said South Africans needed to start asking critical questions about what the “new normal” should be.

“Does it mean increasing poverty and ill health, loss of livelihood and letting people die due to human greed?”

Answering his own question, Dr Seoka said that Bench Marks Foundation had always believed that people must come first, and that economic life begins with communities.

“Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has revealed the fault lines, and now is the time for the industry to take responsibility and go beyond the mine gates to recognise all the mining impacted communities’ socio-economic needs, and be reminded that most communities gave away their land in an uninformed manner, thus in the process lost their livelihoods, through forced removal,” he concluded.

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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