



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Protect the land from landgrabbers, Bishop to tell Mining Indaba

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Democratically elected leaders such as cabinet ministers should protect communities from land grabbers. Instead, people's land continues to be stripped, degraded and ultimately destroyed for profit from mining activities.

This is the hard-hitting message that the Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation, Bishop Jo Seoka, will deliver to the African Mining Indaba due to start in Cape Town tomorrow.

In his speech to the Indaba on its sustainable development day on Tuesday 5 February, the Bishop will say: "It is difficult to understand why the minister of mineral resources appears to support foreign invaders of the land to force development for short-term financial benefits instead of sustainable development for the people when they have democratic rights to choose and decide their future.

"All this tells us that the new dawn of President Ramaphosa is nothing but talk, otherwise democratically elected ministers would protect communities and their land from land grabbers."

The Bishop is encouraged by the inclusion of a sustainable development day in the Mining Indaba, and notes that this is indicative of the increasing importance of the concept of sustainable development in the modern discourse.

"The primary goal of "counter development", that of sustainable development, is to provide people with the means to make fully informed choices about their own future. Any other form of development, particularly one that is geared towards instant economic benefits, is not sustainable but contributes towards disruption of traditional practices, and promotes social and environmental destruction.

"The way mining is forced on the people as a means of development is discouraging the fullest possible use of local resources, knowledge and skills. But negotiated development until full and informed agreement is reached has the outcome of promoting self-respect and self-reliance, restoring human dignity and upholding the integrity of the environment, thereby protecting life-sustaining diversity and creating the conditions for locally based, truly sustaining development," he will say in his speech.

The Bishop contrasts traditional economic development with sustainable development: "Despite its potential to contribute towards people's welfare, economic development fails to promote sustainable small scale decentralised economic enterprises. It only succeeds in creating a dream of a better, richer and more comfortable life. Unfortunately, this illusion manifests itself in an emphasis on commercial gains and material possessions such cellular phones and other gadgets that give

impression of wealth, modernity and prosperity. The opposite is, however, true and part of the ample proof that mining is unsustainable. Poverty is never eliminated. However, mining activity leads to the uncontrolled rise squatter communities, environmental destruction becomes worse, and the gap between the poor and the rich widens. The problem is that development alone has become linked to narrow goals of short-term profit and expediency and has been accorded an unwarranted influence in shaping our society.”

In his speech, Bishop Seoka encourages the mining industry to make use of two of Bench Marks Foundation’s products, viz the Independent Capacity Building Fund (ICF) and Independent Problem-Solving Service (IPSS), both of which open possibilities for constructive engagement.

“There are enough examples around the world where mediated dialogue has resolved problems that appeared to be insurmountable. We are more than willing to be of assistance if the objective of government and business is sustainable development. It will be fruitless to coerce people to accept development that under-develops them because there will be resistance to it from communities.”

Earlier in the speech, he refers to several case studies of communities negatively impacted by mining, including that of the Amadiba people of the Xolobeni community in the Eastern Cape.

“The truth of this unfortunate fiasco is the failure of the government officials to listen to the people. There are no records or evidence to show that the Amadiba people do not want development. They have said time and again that they prefer eco-tourism and organic agriculture to mining because it offers them long-term sustainable development compared to mining which is not only destructive but has a short life span of fifteen to twenty years.

“This is their reason for stopping Transworld Energy and Mineral Resources and the state from destroying the natural beauty of this part of the Eastern Cape. The High Court’s recent decision that communities must give their consent to mining activity, rather than merely being consulted about it, was a seminal moment in ensuring better quality of people’s lives.”

Bishop Seoka notes that mining houses will in future have to seek consent from communities for investments that can now only be realised through mutually agreed sustainable development programmes. This approach has the potential to also stop environmental degradation which destroys the land, making it unsuitable for agricultural and stock farming, he says.

Asking whether society wants its children and generations to come to inherit an uninhabitable earth, Bishop Seoka says he doubts this.

“There is enough evidence that investing in society and in sustainable development pays good dividends, is profitable and guarantees a more healthy and just society now and in future. There is no reason, therefore why business such as mining should take shortcuts which destroy the mother earth for profit.”

The Bishop adds: “Sustainable development is an approach to development that seeks to create a balance between different and competing needs on the one hand, against an awareness of the environment, social and economic limitations faced by the society on the other.

“Unfortunately, it must be said that mining has had a devastating impact on both communities (human) and environment (nature). We have at our disposal ample evidence that confirms the destructiveness of this activity, and the damage it has caused to both communities and environment.

“Bench Marks’ studies and research through its Policy Gap series has informed us that mining is destructive rather than constructive, increasing our commitment to advocate for sustainable development around the mining communities. If there are no sustainable development programmes that are carefully thought through and implemented, the result can only be regrettable because the future will be bleaker. President Ramaphosa’s new dawn will remain but a dream for the poorest of the poor,” he says.

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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