Social Labour Plan commitment welcomed as a first for mining

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A public commitment to publish its Social Labour Plan on the company's website by Mark Cutifani, Chief Executive of Anglo American PLC is a step in the right direction and more companies need to follow suit, says the Bench Marks Foundation.

The commitment by Cutifani followed a question raised during a session at the Mining Indaba by the Bench Marks Foundation, as to why it is so hard to access Social Labour Plans. That meeting is taking place this week in Cape Town and running at the same time as the Alternative Mining Indaba.

"Honesty, transparency and open communication between companies, governments, communities and workers are essential if the mining sector wishes to recover from its losses due to the reduction in commodity prices and looming massive job cuts," Capel pointed out.

During the intense discussions and debates at the 7th Alternative Mining Indaba, lack of transparency has been one of the topics consistently raised by the hundreds of participants attending the conference from all over the world.

"In our vast experience in working with those within the mining sector and around mines, mistrust and lack of clear communication has been a catalyst for majority of incidents that occur, particularly strikes," says Capel.

"Mining companies continue to shut their workers out of what is happening and workers normally only find out about layoffs and closures through the media, when it's too late. No consultation and no preparation is given to either staff or those who will be affected by these actions."

Capel noted that the Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Revd Thabo Makgoba, had told those at the Mining Indaba that building trust between mines and stakeholders did not happen overnight, especially when harm had been done.

"He also said that to build trust required companies to invest time and effort in closing the gaps between the mine and its stakeholders. The Archbishop said that a lot of healing needs to be done in many communities, like Marikana, but that this would require companies to admit to making mistakes and saying sorry.

"We agree, and we insist that companies must be more transparent and honest in their reporting. We continue to push for Social Labour Plans (SLPs) to be made freely available to communities and workers so that they can see what has been promised and can hold the companies accountable,"

"Transparency is about full disclosure of information. The receiver should have full access to what he/she wants, not just the information that the company wants to provide, no matter how uncomfortable this may be,"

"Commitments such as that made by Cutifani to share this information is vital, especially since what they do clearly affects so many."

Capel said that Social Labour Plans should define the commitments made by the mine and their annual reports should talk to this plan. It should highlight what they have done and what they intend to do. If communities are able to easily access this, they can see what to follow up on and hold the company accountable for shortfalls.

"This is what we have been aiming for: for communities to be empowered with knowledge about what has been planned by mines for their environment and what steps the companies have undertaken to promote socio-economic growth and development as well as their plans for when the mine comes to an end."

In terms of South African law, mining companies are required to submit Social and Labour Plans (SLPs) that contain the regulatory requirements of the mine to the Department of Minerals and Resources prior to the granting of a mining right.

Once the mining right has been granted, the mine is required to implement its undertakings and programmes and then report against the respective progress on an annual basis so that it can retain its mineral right.

The Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) was created provide a space for everyone from all over Africa and the world to discuss and workshop subjects that are wreaking havoc or working well in the mining sector.

The theme this year was "Making natural resources work for the people and ended with a march to the Cape Town International Convention Centre to highlight the injustices communities and miners endure as a result of mining and the high incidences of deaths experienced as a result of mining. A final communiqué was handed over to a representative of the African Union at the end of the march. To date, those directly representing the mining companies have not accepted declarations from the Alternative Mining Indaba.

For more information on the AMI, go to www.altminingindaba.co.za. In addition, you can follow the indaba on Twitter: @AltMiningIndaba and on http://alternativeminingindaba.blogspot.com/ and Facebook.

For more information on the Bench Marks Foundation, go to www.bench-marks.org.za.

The following organisations are stakeholders and sponsors of the AMI2016: The Economic Justice Network of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association, Publish what you pay, Norwegian Church Aid, South African Council of Churches, Mozambique CC, Bench Marks Foundation, Diakonia, Council of Churches Zambia, Zimbabwe Council of Churches and Oxfam.

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

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