



Media statement by Bench Marks Southern Africa for Corporate Social Responsibility

Embargoed for: 10h00: Monday: 25th June 2007

Mining operations pose serious health risks

The health and safety of workers in the platinum mining industry in the North West Province is seriously at risk.

In a recent study done by the Bench Marks Foundation for Southern Africa for Corporate Social Responsibility, health and safety threats have been revealed that are closely related to the emergence of informal settlements around the mines and the workplace conditions within the mines.

Executive Director of Bench Marks Foundation, John Capel, says these risks have been no where more clearly illustrated than in last week's suspension of operations of Anglo Platinum's largest mine, The Rustenburg Platinum Mine, due to safety issues.

The researchers faced unacceptable conditions concerning various aspects of health and safety in the mines that were part of the survey - Anglo Platinum, Implats, Lonplats, and Xstrata. The results of a previous audit by the mine health and safety inspectorate of Amplats in 1999 seem to be confirmed: corrective measures to ensure predetermined safety objectives were not enforced or coordinated adequately.

Turning to the inhalation of dust Capel said this has long-term affects on the workers and due to the substances that it contains.

"We found that many workers suffer from silicosis, a respiratory disease that is caused by inhaling silica and results in inflammation and scarring of the lung tissue or tuberculosis.

"Overall, an increase of 80% of patients around Rustenburg suffers from respiratory infections. The extent of air pollution caused by the mines still has to be sufficiently examined as there is a lack of independent air quality monitoring capacities in the region."

Besides the obvious effects of the workplace environment on workers such as muscular and skeletal problems, several health issues are indirectly linked to mining and

have become seriously concerning.

This includes the informal settlements that have emerged in the mining area around Rustenburg. According to estimates, 250 000 people live in informal settlements around Rustenburg.

Due to migrant labour, a living-out allowance by the mine corporations and a lack of housing opportunities in the mine surroundings, workers have settled in shacks that have no access to sewage, refuse removal, electricity or piped water. This causes a higher incidence of water pollution and respiratory infections that are reinforced by the use of coal and other burning materials as substitutes for electricity.

The affect that the pollution of water sources by these informal settlements and by mining waste will have on the workers still has to be the basis of further research. This also applies to the consequences of acid rain in the mining areas that is caused by high sulphur dioxide and carbon dioxide emissions.

The high HIV and AIDS infection levels in the informal settlements in the North West Province result in further challenges surrounding the health of workers and the mining corporations. The infection levels in the informal settlements around the mines are at 60 %, far above the average of 20% in the rest of the province.

“Mine workers that are employed by subcontractors do not have access to the health care facilities at the mines,” explains Capel “This implies a serious inequality existing in the mines as contract workers neither appear in the HIV/AIDS statistics nor are they entitled to get any kind of medicine including Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART), this brings into doubt the claims by the mines of a 16% infection level within their mines.”

Although the mining corporations seem to be aware of the impact of HIV/AIDS on their workers and their dependants, they ignore the impact that the policies of migrant labour, sub-contracting, the living out allowance and the lack of job opportunities for women (who then engage in sex services to earn a living) has on the health of the community.

ENDS

The full report together with all the recommendations and photographs can be found on: www.bench-marks.org.

Bench Marks Foundation Southern Africa (The Bench Marks Foundation) is part of an international NGO and Faith Based coalition that also has partners in Australia, Hong Kong, Canada, the USA, Colombia and the United Kingdom. Its partners in South Africa are the SA Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET), Industrial Mission of South Africa, and the Justice and Peace Department of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference. The Bench Marks Foundation is committed to providing leadership and advocacy on issues regarding benchmarking of good corporate governance, ethical and socially responsible investment as well as linking people and institutions committed to these ideals.

Issued by Quo Vadis Communications on behalf of Bench Marks Foundation of Southern Africa.

**QUO VADIS COMMUNICATIONS AND ITS STAFF MAY NOT BE QUOTED ON BEHALF OF
BENCH MARKS**

Media contact: Chantal Meugens

Cell: 083 676 2294 or 011 955 5033 or 011 487 0026

E-mail: chantal@quo-vadis.co.za

Client contact: John Capel, Executive Director, Bench Marks Foundation Southern Africa

Cell: 082 874 2653

Tel: 011 832 1743