MEDIA STATEMENT

MINING INDUSTRY COMMITTED TO SUPPORT NATIONAL COVID-19 VACCINE ROLL-OUT EFFORT

Urges Government to expedite negotiations with manufacturers to urgently secure adequate vaccine supply and for all social partners to play a constructive role in rolling out the vaccination campaign

Johannesburg, 15 January 2021: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on the world and South Africa, and is not only a humanitarian crisis but has also sent significant economic shock waves through the global and local economies. There is no doubt that access to an effective vaccine and the significant roll-out of a vaccination programme ('shots in arms') is crucial in the fight against COVID-19, to help re-open the economy in order to save lives and save livelihoods.

The Minerals Council South Africa is committed to supporting a national government-led roll-out of an urgently applied and effective vaccine programme. This was agreed at a meeting of its Board on 11 January, where its members resolved to support the government-led national COVID-19 vaccine roll-out, in partnership with government, organised business through Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) and Business for South Africa (B4SA) and with organised labour. Minerals Council members are developing plans to assist in the vaccine roll-out using the sector's significant healthcare infrastructure and delivery capability. At this stage, only governments are able to source vaccines from international suppliers and the South African government is the sole buyer.

Minerals Council President, Mxolisi Mgojo said: "There was unanimous support by Board members to support the urgent roll-out of the vaccine according the principles of clinical risk and societal impact, with a clear intention of ensuring – as the vaccine becomes more freely available – that mining employees and mining communities are able to access vaccines in line with their risk profiles and as quickly as is possible."

Minerals Council CEO Roger Baxter said: "While many sectors are questioning the slow progress of government securing a major bilateral vaccine deal, we are now aware that Government is not only seeing the urgent securing of a vaccine as a national priority, but also recognises that it is government's responsibility at a public health care level to guarantee the funding. So far Government has only secured the Covax allocation (covering 5.9 million people), and more recently the 1.5 million Oxford AstraZeneca vaccines for frontline healthcare workers (covering 750,000 people). President Ramaphosa indicated that Government is close to securing another 20 million vaccines. Given challenges in the public healthcare infrastructure there is no doubt that business (BUSA and B4SA), and the mining sector in particular, can play a major role in the end-to-end planning and roll-out of the vaccine programme to assist government and the nation. Cooperative partnerships and urgency are key.

"Government needs to expedite the bilateral negotiations with international suppliers and, working with the BUSA/B4SA structures, to develop the systems and infrastructure to effectively, quickly and transparently implement this programme.

"The Minerals Council and its members have decided to play an active role, in partnership with our social partners, to help with the vaccine roll-out. While Government is primarily responsible for funding the vaccine roll-out and is the single buyer, the industry can play a material role in accelerating the vaccination programme on mines and in mining communities.

"This is a critical national effort. We need Government to focus on securing the vaccines and we will work collectively – together with the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, BUSA and B4SA and mining unions – to urgently roll out the vaccination programme," says Mr Baxter.

Charmane Russell
Tel: +27 (0)11 880 3924 or Mobile: +27 (0) 82 372 5816
Email: charmane@rasc.co.za
Web: www.mineralscouncil.org.za