**PRESS RELEASE**

International Zinc Association launches major campaign to grow local zinc industry

**14 April 2021:** The R100 billion Infrastructure Fund announced by President **Cyril Ramaphosa** in his State of the Nation Address on 11 February is likely to see an increase in the demand for galvanized steel, especially with the economy anticipated to grow by 2.1% this year and 2.2% in 2022. The focus on renewable energy to assist in meeting the country’s electricity shortfall will also lead to a boom in solar energy plants and wind farms, which present another avenue for the increased uptake of zinc-coated steel.

This is good news for the Africa Desk of the [International Zinc Association](http://www.zinc.org) (IZA) under **Simon Norton**, tasked to address the decline of the zinc industry in the country and on the continent. Internationally, the IZA represents global mining companies and zinc refiners. The main focus is South Africa at present, particularly in the key target areas of mining, construction and infrastructure development, but the plan is to include potential growth markets such as Kenya, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco in the near future.

While South Africa has 20% of the world’s zinc deposits, it no longer refines any zinc, following the closure of the Zincor refinery in Springs by mining company Exxaro at the end of 2011. Up to that point, the country produced 110 000 t/y of refined zinc worth about R4.3 billion. From 2014 to 2019, South Africa imported R15 billion worth of refined zinc.

However, the uptake of refined zinc has declined rapidly from 86 000 t in 2015 to 47 000 t in 2020. This represents a major challenge, and therefore the IZA’s short-term goal is to gradually boost zinc uptake to a new high of 60 000 t/y, ultimately peaking at 90 000 t/y in three years’ time. “Zinc is one of the major global commodities, along with the likes of iron ore,” comments Norton.

The majority of refined zinc is used for corrosion protection of steel. However, its varied applications range from being an essential ingredient in fertiliser for the agricultural industry, to being an important nutrient and health supplement that can even boost the immune system to ward off the coronavirus responsible for the global Covid-19 pandemic. Zinc is also a major constituent in the die-casting of metal automotive components and zinc oxide aids in vulcanising rubber tyres.

But zinc truly comes into its own in terms of offering long-lasting corrosion protection, an important consideration in South Africa’s coastal areas. As a barrier protection, zinc resists corrosion by isolating steel from the external environment. Zinc is also anodic to steel, meaning it corrodes sacrificially to protect the underlying material. In addition, a natural zinc patina develops as the coating weathers, slowing the overall corrosion rate, as well as creating a material with a distinctive appearance that is much in demand by architects and designers, for example.

Such a coating is applied by the process of either hot dip galvanizing or continuous galvanizing, the latter used mainly for steel sheet. The main mission of the IZA is to promote awareness of the corrosion protection capability of zinc among professionals such as designers and civil and consulting engineers. It is also hoped to encourage South African zinc industry companies such as hot dip galvanizers, continuous galvanizers, wire plants and die casters to become IZA members.

The IZA also plans to reignite the debate of re-establishing a zinc refinery in the country, ideally in the Saldanha Bay Industrial Development Zone (IDZ). This will not only lessen its dependence on costly imports, but also make the refined end product more readily available locally and therefore able to be specified and consumed in greater quantities.

“The debate around building a new zinc refinery is linked to the issue of the future development of our rail sector to promote such wide-ranging industrial and economic development. For example, locating such a refinery in the Saldanha IDZ is ideal, as it means that the Sishen-Saldanha rail link can be used to convey zinc concentrate. In addition, we can build new rail linkages from Gamsberg and Prieska, which are massive infrastructure projects by themselves that stand to generate thousands of much-needed jobs,” highlights Norton.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the IZA launched two highly successful webinars last year on the essentials of hot dip and continuous galvanizing. It also plans to reach out to important industry bodies representing the major engineering disciplines, as well as the Minerals Council of South Africa, Transnet, the National Ports Authority, the Department of Water and Sanitation and the South African Local Government Association.

***Ends***

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**Notes to the Editor**To download hi-res images for this release, please visit [http://media.ngage.co.za](http://media.ngage.co.za/) and click the International Zinc Association link to view the company’s press office.

**About the International Zinc Association**

The IZA is the only global industry association dedicated exclusively to the interests of zinc and its users. Operating internationally and locally through its regional affiliates, the IZA helps sustain the long-term global demand for zinc and its markets by promoting such key end uses as corrosion protection for steel and zinc as being essential in human health and crop nutrition. IZA’s main programmes are Sustainability & Environment, Technology & Market Development and Communications.

In South Africa, the IZA plays a vital role in establishing the basis for the successful revitalisation of the zinc industry by increasing awareness of zinc and its applications and benefits in key sectors and markets, which will ultimately translate into the increased uptake of zinc.

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