

South African Religious Leaders Warn of Constitutional Crisis

National church leaders and other faith leaders gathering in Johannesburg from 19-20 October 2016 at OR Tambo, for their annual meeting, issued the following statement:

Conference Statement

Preamble

We, as religious leaders have reflected on the meaning of John 10:10 in the Bible of having “abundant life for all” in South Africa – that no-one should be excluded or left behind.

The current crisis in South Africa has gone beyond the “fees must fall” and is in fact a constitutional crisis - noting especially the actions taken by the NPA against the Minister of Finance. It manifests itself in leadership and political factional conflicts in public institutions – that creates instability and distract attention from the fundamental challenges: fighting poverty, creating employment and extending quality health services to all.

The meeting expresses its serious concern about the phenomenon of state capture which is undermining the public good and national discourse and threatens our financial sovereignty. The meeting urged all role players to root out this phenomenon as a matter of national urgency

It also noted the serious shortage of social workers (50 000) – and urgent need to finalize a National Social Development Act in line with the National Development Plan (NDP).

We appreciate the co-operation with the National Health Department to fight TB, the main cause of death in South Africa, and further the national health objectives in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the NDP.

The meeting discussed the challenges confronting the country in the following areas and took specific resolutions on each:

Education

An education system that is free, decolonized and of high quality, is a just and moral plea for our society to give content to the promise of freedom won in 1994. We also acknowledge the fact that we are facing more systemic problems within the education system at large. If we don't deal with that, the current crises will come back to haunt us again.

As religious leaders we support the quest for solutions by the students, the vice-chancellors, parents and government. We acknowledge and applaud the work of mediation, prayer and peace efforts done by different faith leaders across our nation during these difficult times. In the days and weeks ahead this work may be even more necessary and we need to be more co-ordinated through the national ecumenical structures.

We urge all religious leaders to work through established reference groups that were established by provincial council of churches and/or the local ecumenical structures.

We believe, however, that some of the methods used by students detract from their noble struggle. We urge the students to conduct the struggle with the dignity and with due regard for human life and to our national public assets.

We urge all role players to strive to conclude the 2016 academic year successfully.

Social Development

The religious leaders noted the completion of the review of White Paper for Social Welfare. Many issues raised in the report of the ministerial committee were also raised by the NRASD for many years for example the transformation towards a developmental approach, the funding of the social welfare sector, the expansion of social service delivery to reach every corner of South Africa, the shortage of trained social professionals and the partnership between churches, NGO's and the Departments of Social Development.

The NRASD is of the view that this report is opening a window of opportunity for a dialogue between all role players in the Social Development sector regarding the findings and proposals of the ministerial committee. The goal of this dialogue should be to agree on a framework for the social development of the South African society. Important themes that should be part of such a framework are the development of a common vision amongst all role players, the roles of the various role players in the sector, the establishment of solid partnerships, the funding of social development and the human resource needs of the sector.

Economy of life

We resolve and propose that given that this is a Kairos moment with regard to the following:

Theology, development, poverty

- Use the economists in the faith communities to assist and help us to reflect on the economy
- Conversation of theology and economy needs to be ongoing
- Africa Day 2017 (25 May) be utilised to focus on poverty, economics and the regional dynamics of economic relations
- The need to revisit previous resolutions by the SACC, Industrial mission and the current mining conversations which will inform the ongoing mission of the church
- Establish a movement for critical engagement by theologians and economist for public discourse in the area of poverty and the alleviation there of.

Leakage of public funding

We as a group are sensing (after engaging with senior representatives of the national Treasury: We as a group are sensing that there are at present an enormous leakage of state funds. We urgently ask all relevant parties to dig deeper into this matter. We are convinced that this situation is aggravating the already desperate situation of the poor. We are thus saying this in solidarity of the poor and pray that justice will prevail.

Clarify the role and contribution of international donors and partnerships

We are concerned about possible regulation of international funding supporting civil society development initiatives. International funding contributes substantially to HIV and Aids Programmes, human rights programmes in South Africa.

Health

The meeting express its support for the guidelines of the WHO and the UN Sustainable Development Goals that quality health care is a fundamental human right and we have to overcome the inequalities that exist in this regard. Health is not only the absence of certain diseases, but a fundamental part of having life in abundance, holistically in terms of mind, body and soul.

We welcome the opportunity to partner with the NDOH in the national TB and Aids Response, as well as the Global Fund, to fight TB in South Africa.

We commit ourselves to regional co-operation (and on a Southern African regional level) in improving healthcare...

We identify the following challenges:

- Lack of respect and humane treatment of patients by some health professionals in public health system
- Public private partnerships: difficulty of support for church-based hospitals
- Difficulty of getting training licenses for nurses and doctors at private initiatives
- SANAC – does not include strength of prevention and education programmes of faith communities; conflict with priorities of international donors/ support replenishment of Global Fund, but locally side-lined.

Press Freedom

The meeting noted the 39th commemoration of Press Freedom day on 19th October and reaffirmed its belief in press freedom as one of the essential gains of our democracy which should be protected and defended.

Our Religious texts

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 7:12

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbour as yourself.” Matthew 22: 37, 39

“Oh you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be he rich or poor, God is a Better Protector to both (than you). So follow not the lusts (emotions), lest you may avoid justice, and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, God is Ever Well Acquainted with what you do.” The Women 4:135 (Quran)

Participants:

1. Archbishop Dr. Thabo Makgoba – Anglican Church of Southern Africa
2. Archbishop Dr. Zandisile Magxwalisa – Jerusalem Church in South Africa
3. Bishop Ziphozihle Siwa – Methodist Church of Southern Africa / SACC
4. Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana – South African Council of Churches
5. The Most Revd Lunga ka Siboto – Ethiopian Episcopal Church
6. Bishop Sithembele Sipuka – Roman Catholic Church
7. Bishop Nkosekhaya Dikana – Word of Life
8. Bishop Horst Muller - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa
9. Bishop Melumzi Norhushu – Ebenezer Christian Church
10. Dr. Siphoh Mahokoto – NRASD
11. Dr. Gustav Claassen – Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa
12. Dr. Emmanuel Tshilenga – International Church of Pretoria
13. Dr. William Van Der Merwe – Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa
14. Dr. Abraham Hanekom – Commission For Witness
15. Dr. Johan Beukes – In Harmonie
16. Dr. Renier Koegelenberg – NRASD
17. Dr. Robert Munthali - Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa
18. Rev. Vusi Mkhungo – Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa
19. Fr. Richard Menatsi – NRASD / Roman Catholic Church
20. Rev. Mkhusele Dukwana – Presbyterian Church of Africa
21. Rev. Bongokwakhe Mkhize – Presbyterian Church Africa
22. Rev. Miranda Magxwalisa - Jerusalem Church in South Africa
23. Rev. Moss Ntlha – The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa
24. Rev. Hermy Damons – The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa
25. Rev. Cornelis Janse van Rensburg - Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa
26. Rev. Canon Desmond Lambrechts – Anglican Church of Southern Africa
27. Rev. Senamo Molisiwa – Council of African Instituted Churches
28. Rev. Yoliswa Mahinji – Salvation Reformed Church
29. Mr. Henry Jeffreys – Journalist and analyst

30. Ms. Frieda le Roux – EFSA Media

32. Sheikh Achmat Sedick – Muslim Judicial Council