

FRIDAY, 15 MAY 2020

MEDIA RELEASE: Civil Society meets President Ramaphosa to request urgent financial support

Today (15 May 2020) at 12pm, President Cyril Ramaphosa and the Community Constituency Covid-19 Front (Covid-19 Front) will be meeting the social partners at NEDLAC to discuss a number of issues. High on the agenda is the lack of financial support to Civil Society – in particular, funding from the Solidarity Fund and lack of cooperation from the National Department of Social Development.

At the last meeting at NEDLAC less than a month ago with the President – he assured the sector that all departments will cooperate with Civil Society to implement the community-based measures in response to the war against the pandemic.

The President’s commitment was as a result of acknowledging the fact that since the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the novel Coronavirus a pandemic on 11 March 2020 – Civil Society organisations had without being asked and with limited resources, stepped up with immediate response to support the Government and citizens. The President’s commitment was intended to ensure that as Civil Society, through our vast networks within the communities we can continue to augment government’s capacity in the fight against COVID-19.

Unfortunately, the Civil Society organisations which carry out their work with limited resources under normal circumstances – have been supporting the work of government without any funding. The Covid-19 Front had applied for funding from the Solidarity Fund which was established by the President on 22 March 2020 and we have not received a single cent. The many NGOs have had to stop delivering services due to lack of funding while some have had to make do with no funding to ensure they support government’s efforts. The Covid-19 Front is running a nerve centre in Pretoria to coordinate and support the work of civic organisations with no support or funding.

Furthermore to exacerbate the lack of funding issue, the Department of Social Development (DSD) Minister Lindiwe Zulu’s blatant lack of response to Civil Society and inaccessibility has undermined the President’s commitment. Representing 1000s of NGOs, the Community Constituency Covid-19 Front has on numerous occasions requested engagement with Minister Zulu to align our interventions

with that of government and create a cohesive collaborative effort in response to fighting the spread of the COVID-19 and cushion the vulnerable people against the impact of the pandemic on their lives – unfortunately we have been met with no response whatsoever.

Steve Letsike, Co-Chairperson of the Community Constituency Covid-19 Front says, “We are highly disappointed by Minister Zulu’s non-responsiveness at a time where people are starving, many losing their jobs while others are reeling from rife unemployment and an economy that is strained beyond comprehension. What is even more disappointing is – due to the lack of response from the Minister and her department, Civil Society has had to resort to writing an Open letter to the President bemoaning lack of cooperation which ultimately denies access to services for many South Africans.”

The Minister continues to treat Civil Society with nothing but utter disdain despite the fact when feeding schemes and food distribution took strain, the many NGOs under her purview and without support from the DSD expanded their mandates to include feeding the hungry. Among other things, these very NGOs worked to ensure that children who previously depended on school feeding schemes are prioritised.

In our meeting with the President this afternoon, among a few COVID-19 response issues we intend to discuss with him – we will use the opportunity to sharply raise the detriment of the minister’s attitude to the dignity of citizens and her contribution to the collective anxiety of South Africans. Most importantly, we intend to leave the meeting with a resolution to our funding needs from the Solidarity Fund.

It is no secret that the DSD has many challenges, however – now more than ever, the Minister and her officials need all the support they can get in particular from Civil Society. This support and comprehensive response to the pandemic can only be offered when the Minister demonstrates accessibility and openness to collaboration.

“South Africans have seen the efficacy of the interventions and programmes from the likes SANAC, of which it was as a result of cooperation between Civil Society and Government. In a time of crisis and the pandemic that knows no end like the COVID-19, Government needs all the support it can get through collaboration with all social partners. We have worked together towards a common objective before and successfully tackled the AIDS pandemic. We can do it all over again but only through cooperation, support and funding,” further says Letsike. concludes, “The war against COVID-19 does not require pockets of excellence as we have experienced from the cooperation from some provincial

departments of social development. Just as we are responding from a health perspective – in concert, the social relief measures also have to be implemented in a cohesive manner and the leadership of the DSD is instrumental in making this happen. We are hopeful that by the time we come out of our meeting with the President this afternoon, we will have resolved the issue of Minister Zulu and the marching orders will be clear to her department for the sake of our citizens.”

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About the Community Constituency Covid-19 Front

The Community Constituency Covid-19 Front was established as a formal advisory body to facilitate the participation of civil society sectors and networks, including those represented in the national response and implementations of Community-Based Measures in response to the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19). The Community Constituency Covid-19 Front promotes an inclusive, competent and responsive civil society that effectively serves the needs of communities by linking and diversifying civil society actors, expanding the sector's response and ensuring better coordination, thus improving operations, and enhancing connections between civil society organisations with government, business labour, their stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The Covid-19 Front aims to provide a hub of information and contacts for distribution and engagement through our members across the country.

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