



Diakonia Council of Churches strongly condemns the violence in Kennedy Road

As an ecumenical organisation representing local churches in eThekweni, Diakonia Council of Churches strongly condemns the recent attacks on the property and lives of innocent and vulnerable people in the informal settlement of Kennedy Road.

The settlement, home to some 7 000 residents most of whom are economic refugees, has been fraught with tensions arising from, amongst other things, poor service delivery for many years. The formation of the social movement known as *Abahlali baseMjondolo* has been a concerted and commendable effort on the part of poor people to address the needs, concerns and fears of the most marginalised within our community, particularly those of women and children.

More recently we have witnessed the brutal attacks on innocent residents, which have targeted members of *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, and their families and property. The resultant deaths, detentions and beatings, and displacement of an estimated 2 000 residents are deeply saddening and we wish to extend our sympathies and condolences to all those affected. The effects of these recent events on community and family life should not be underestimated. As school children prepare for examinations, every effort needs to be made to ensure that the situation is normalised with expediency.

Of grave concern is the long standing inaction and compliance on the part of certain members of the South African Police Services (SAPS), particularly those at the Sydenham police station, as well as the alleged compliance on the part of SAPS members and some members of the local branch of the African National Congress (ANC). A crucial aspect of our democracy is the protection of every citizen, regardless of his or her economic status or political affiliation, and these rights need to be secured and defended by, amongst others, those state organs which are tasked to serve and protect. In particular, the systematic and intentional targeting of members of *Abahlali baseMjondolo* and their families is deplorable and we call upon national government to urgently establish a commission of enquiry aimed at calling to account all those responsible for these atrocities.

We furthermore call on local and provincial government to provide immediate relief to those affected, especially the most vulnerable, including women and children. We call on and encourage our local communities to extend a hand of reconciliation and support to those affected and urge local leaders to play a meaningful and immediate role in securing peace and tolerance in Kennedy Road.

We join the many voices, both local and international, in condemning the violence, howsoever this has been caused and by whomever. We urge all

residents of Kennedy Road to actively embrace the most basic principles of democracy enshrined in our Constitution which seek to promote the protection of the rights of citizens to organise themselves and to seek a better life for all, regardless of race, ethnic identity, language, economic status or political affiliation.

The shack-dwelling communities of our country are most deserving of basic amenities such as the provision of fresh water, adequate sanitation and health services, access to economic opportunities, the supply of electricity and refuse removal, and a long term solution to their housing needs. The Kennedy Road community has been subjected to prolonged agony and continues to suffer in abject poverty, whilst becoming unwitting victims of political power plays, corruption and crime. We urge our elected leaders to actively seek a long-lasting and sustainable solution to the problems and challenges experienced by the poorest of the electorate.

Finally, we urge all politicians and social activists, especially those at local level, to embrace the fundamentals of our democracy which seek to encourage and nurture difference and diversity, which celebrate our rich and varied heritage, and which seek to embrace the rights of every citizen to the unfettered freedom of association and expression, without fear or favour. Says Bishop Barry Wood, Chairperson of Diakonia Council of Churches: "Our country's long and painful history reflects our nation's desire for peace and stability for all, and the advances made towards the deepening of democracy must be supported and defended by us all, most especially those entrusted to serve us and manage our resources in ways which glorify God".

END