

A Programme of Action in the time of COVID-19
A call for social solidarity in South Africa
23 March 2020

We, as civic organisations, trade unions, organisations of informal workers, faith-based organisations and community structures in South Africa, call on all people, every stakeholder and sector, to contain infection, reduce transmission and mitigate the social and political impacts of the COVID-19 virus.

Government retains a critical role in coordinating actions and distributing resources, yet its efforts will not be enough if we do not hold it to account and commit to a broad, bottom-up, public effort at this time. In a society as unequal as ours, we must work together to ensure that all safety measures are shared equitably.

We have a particular duty to safeguard those who are most vulnerable, those who are already living with hunger, weakened immune systems and poor access to health care. Greater restrictions and shutdowns are coming, but they will only work if full support is provided to working class and poor communities. Drastic measures are needed if we are to avoid disaster. Each of us must act now.

Acknowledging other statements coming from fellow movements and organisations, we put forward the following Programme of Action for all of us to work towards in the coming days.

Income security for all

In order for people to remain at home there must be income security for all. Employers must continue to pay salaries or grant sick leave while employees are restricted to their homes, and where continued salaries are impossible government must provide workers with income protection for wages lost during the pandemic. There must be a moratorium on retrenchments during this time. Self-employed, casual workers and those whose income is suspended at this time must be supported by government to prevent job-seeking movement and provide income security. The social grant system must be extended to ensure the direct transfer of cash to households during this precarious time. All defaults on mortgage and debt repayments during this time must be non-consequential. All evictions and removals must be banned. As Labour has proposed, a bold stimulus package will be required in the coming period. These measures must be developed in consultation with poor and working-class formations.

2. All households, residential institutions, the homeless and the informally housed must have easy access to sanitation, especially water and safe ablution facilities.

There must be an immediate opening of restricted water meters, mass-provision of safe water access points with unconstrained flow in areas where there is limited household access to water, and mass-distribution of safe ablution facilities to informal settlements. All of these sanitation points must have access to soap and/or sanitizer and information on the prevention of the virus.

3. All households, residential institutions, the homeless and the informally housed must have access to food

If we are to stay at home during this time, access to nutritious food is fundamental. The absence of the School Nutrition Programme is devastating. A coordinated and safe roll-out of food packages directly to distribution points in food-stressed neighbourhoods must be implemented. Failing that, the child support grant must be augmented. Support for locally-organised food systems must be strengthened.

4. Essential private facilities must be appropriated for public use to provide a unified and fair distribution of essential goods and services to all

National resources need to be focused and deployed in order to combat the epidemic. Essential services – health centres, food services, water and sanitation etc. – should be identified for urgent support and extension. This may require the conversion of factories and other places of production to produce sanitiser, protective clothing, water tanks, soap, food parcels, ventilators and other essential medical equipment. Essential private facilities must be made available for public use to provide a unified and fair distribution of essential goods and services to all. It requires that the public and private health systems need to be regarded as one national health system and coordinated in the national and public interest, also through state appropriation if necessary, as Spain recently demonstrated. Finances may have to be mobilised through unconventional means such as compulsory national bonds or loans, reforms to tax structures and others. Exported food might need to be redistributed locally. Regulations on price hikes should be implemented.

5. Community self-organisation and local action is critical, as it our representation in national coordination

Civic organisations, community structures, trade unions and faith-based organisations will be extremely important in organising on the ground during this emergency. We must all take action where we are. Civic structures must be engaged, supported and given representation on the National Command Council. The distribution of reliable information, essential services and care for our people will require a massive coordinated effort from community leaders and structures. Volunteers must be trained and organised for safe, coordinated, campaigns at street-level and for those living in institutions. Middle-class and wealthy communities and organisations have an obligation to make resources available to poor and working-class communities.

6. Community Health Workers must be insourced, trained and supported and, along with other frontline health and emergency services workers, must have access to the resources necessary to safely and effectively contain the virus

The 70 000 Community Health Workers are the outreach arms of our health. If they and other frontline health workers and emergency services workers are to provide the community services required during this time, they must all have access to reliable information, safety and protective gear, and the testing and other resources for effective containment of the virus. All workers must also receive safety and protective gear.

We must identify strategies to calm tensions and divert violence in our homes

Home-based quarantine will escalate family and relationship tensions, and will likely lead to more violence against women, children and others most marginalized in our families and communities including LGBTI people and foreign nationals. We need to

identify strategies to calm tensions and divert violence in our homes and communities over this time. We need a strong education campaign against all forms of violence, especially domestic violence. We need to strengthen safe responses from existing neighbourhood, regional and national organisations supporting women and children. This includes extending access to helplines for domestic violence, mental health, easing referral systems to shelters, and resourcing shelters to keep them open, functional and safe in the time of the virus.

8. Communication must be free, open and democratised

There must be an immediate distribution of free data to all, so that people are able to receive good information, contact loved ones during isolation and quarantine, and understand the measures that are in place to create safety. Access to the best international research should be free and public. There must be daily national press conferences from government leaders alongside scientists and professionals who can keep all of our people informed about the emerging situation.

9. The inequalities within our educational services need to be carefully considered, and mitigated, when moving to remote learning

Data and free website content must be made widely available to educational institutions for continued learning. However, there is massive inequality of access to resources such as computers, electricity, WiFi and learning space, as well difficult home situations that disproportionately affect poor and working-class learners, students and educators. The move to online learning should be made carefully, and as a temporary measure. We should not extend the inequalities in the education system by affording remote education to the few. Schools and universities should consider their collective role as community educators and developers facing an unprecedented shared experience. Schools, residences and dormitories should be understood as a public resource during this time, including for the safe distribution of food and other essential services interrupted by school closures.

We must prevent a nationalist, authoritarian and security-focused approach in containing the virus

We must guard against the easy deployment of military and police to create security in our communities. We must also prevent against creating scapegoats to blame for the current crisis. Instead we must ensure that care and resources are provided for the safety and protection of all who live in our country and in our communities.

How each of us responds to the COVID-19 pandemic will determine who we are as a society. The better we respond now, the better we will be after the pandemic. We must follow international best practice and the science that we have available to us to build an assertive response that works for the context of our own history and society. Our response must be just, equitable, and redistributive if we are to meet the needs of all our people. In times of physical distancing, social solidarity is key.

ENDORSEMENTS

- List below is that of the 105 endorsements to date, to be updated as additional endorsements continue to come in.

1. 021 Cape Town
2. 360 Degrees Environmental Movement
3. Academic and Staff
4. Academics for Free Education
5. ActionAid South Africa
6. Active Citizens Movement
7. African Centre for Biodiversity
8. African Water Commons Collective
9. AIDS Foundation of South Africa
10. AIDS Free Living
11. Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC)
12. Amcare
13. Ashes to Purpose
14. Assembly of the Unemployed Fight
15. ASSITEJ South Africa
16. Auwal Socio-economic Research Institute
17. Black Sash;
18. Bench Marks Foundation
19. Bertha's Cape Town
20. Bonteheuwel Development Forum
21. Centre for Applied Legal Studies
22. Centre for Faith and Community, University of Pretoria
23. Centre for Social Change, University of Johannesburg
24. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
25. Changemakers
26. Civic Action for Public Participation
27. Community Development Foundation, Western Cape
28. Community Development Foundation, Western Cape
29. Community Healing Network
30. Corruption Watch
31. Denis Hurley Centre
32. Development Works
33. Documentary Filmmakers Association
34. Economic Justice Network of
35. Equal Education
36. Extinction Rebellion South Africa
37. Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa
38. Gender Equity Unit, University of the Western Cape
39. Grace Family Church
40. Gun Free South Africa
41. HealthEnabled
42. Heinrich Böll Foundation Cape Town Office
43. Housing Assembly
44. Inclusive and Affirming Ministries
45. Inequality Alliance South Africa
46. Initiative for Community Advancement
47. Institute for Economic Justice
48. Institute for Economic Research on Innovation, Tshwane University of Technology
49. Isandla Institute
50. Ithuba Lethu Recycling Cooperative
51. Just Associates (JASS) Southern Africa
52. Keep Left
53. Khethimpilo
54. Lawyers for Human Rights
55. Liminability
56. Makause Community Development Forum
57. Marikana Youth Movement
58. Medecins Sans Frontières
59. Middleburg Environmental Justice Network
60. Mining Affected Communities United in Action
61. My Vote Counts
62. Natural Justice
63. National Union of Care Workers of SA (NUCWOSA)
64. Ndifuna Ukwazi
65. New World Foundation
66. Observatory Civic Association
67. One Voice for All Hawkers
68. Open Secrets

69. Open Society Foundation South Africa
70. Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Gauteng
71. People's Health Movement South Africa
72. Popular Education Programme
73. Public Affairs Research Institute
74. Public Service Accountability Monitor
75. Public Services International
76. Refugee Social Services
77. Rehana Khan Parker and Associates
78. Rural Health Advocacy Project
79. SA Domestic Services and Allied Workers Union
80. SA Lawyers for Change
81. Salt River Heritage Society
82. Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT)
83. Sexual and Reproductive Justice Coalition
84. Sharp# movement for ecosocialism
85. Social Justice Advocacy Campaign
86. Social Justice Coalition
87. Social Law Project, University of the Western Cape
88. Society Work and Politics Institute, University of the Witwatersrand
89. Sonke Gender Justice
90. South Africa Mining Affected Communities
91. South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU)
92. South African Green Revolutionary Council
93. South African Green Revolutionary Council
94. South African Jews for a Just Peace
95. Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute
96. Support Programme for Industrial Innovation
97. Surplus People's Project
98. The Climate Justice Charter
99. The Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU)
100. The Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre
101. The Independent Producers Organisation
102. The Institute for the Healing of Memories
103. The Interim People's Library
104. The Mbegu Platform
105. The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign
106. Treasured Gems Cancer Support
107. Treatment Action Campaign
108. Triangle Project
109. Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education
110. Tshwane Leadership Foundation
111. Westdene Sophiatown Residents Association
112. Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising
113. Workers World Media Collective
114. Woza Women in Leadership