

South Africa: A Programme of Action in the time of Covid-19 - a call for social solidarity

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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 the infection, reduce transmission and mitigate the social and political impacts of the Covid-19 virus. We put forward the following Programme of Action for all of us to work towards in the coming days.



The 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 healthcare. 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, the 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 the 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.

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 sanitiser and information on the prevention of the virus.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 marginalised 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.

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.

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, wi-fi and learning space, as well as 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 the 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 to date *[114 movements]:*)

021 Cape Town
360 Degrees Environmental Movement
Academic and Staff
Academics for Free Education
ActionAid South Africa
Active Citizens Movement
African Centre for Biodiversity
African Water Commons Collective
AIDS Foundation of South Africa
AIDS Free Living
Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC)
Amcare
Ashes to Purpose
Assembly of the Unemployed Fight
ASSITEJ South Africa
Auwal Socio-economic Research Institute
Black Sash;
Bench Marks Foundation
Bertha's Cape Town
Bonteheuwel Development Forum
Centre for Applied Legal Studies
Centre for Faith and Community, University of Pretoria
Centre for Social Change, University of Johannesburg
Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
Changemakers
Civic Action for Public Participation
Community Development Foundation, Western Cape
Community Development Foundation, Western Cape
Community Healing Network
Corruption Watch
Denis Hurley Centre
Development Works
Documentary Filmmakers Association
Economic Justice Network of
Equal Education
Extinction Rebellion South Africa
Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa
Gender Equity Unit, University of the Western Cape
Grace Family Church
Gun Free South Africa
HealthEnabled
Heinrich Böll Foundation Cape Town Office
Housing Assembly
Inclusive and Affirming Ministries
Inequality Alliance South Africa
Initiative for Community Advancement
Institute for Economic Justice
Institute for Economic Research on Innovation, Tshwane University of Technology
Isandla Institute
Ithuba Lethu Recycling Cooperative
Just Associates (JASS) Southern Africa

Keep Left
Khethimpilo
Lawyers for Human Rights
Liminability
Makause Community Development Forum
Marikana Youth Movement
Medecins Sans Frontières
Middleburg Environmental Justice Network
Mining Affected Communities United in Action
My Vote Counts
Natural Justice
National Union of Care Workers of SA (NUCWOSA)
Ndifuna Ukwazi
New World Foundation
Observatory Civic Association
One Voice for All Hawkers
Open Secrets
Open Society Foundation South Africa
Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Gauteng
People's Health Movement South Africa
Popular Education Programme
Public Affairs Research Institute
Public Service Accountability Monitor
Public Services International
Refugee Social Services
Rehana Khan Parker and Associates
Rural Health Advocacy Project
SA Domestic Services and Allied Workers Union
SA Lawyers for Change
Salt River Heritage Society
Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT)
Sexual and Reproductive Justice Coalition
Sharp# movement for ecosocialism
Social Justice Advocacy Campaign
Social Justice Coalition
Social Law Project, University of the Western Cape
Society Work and Politics Institute, University of the Witwatersrand
Sonke Gender Justice
South Africa Mining Affected Communities
South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU)
South African Green Revolutionary Council
South African Green Revolutionary Council
South African Jews for a Just Peace
Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute
Support Programme for Industrial Innovation
Surplus People's Project
The Climate Justice Charter
The Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU)
The Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre
The Independent Producers Organisation
The Institute for the Healing of Memories

The Interim People's Library
The Mbegu Platform
The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign
Treasured Gems Cancer Support
Treatment Action Campaign
Triangle Project
Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education
Tshwane Leadership Foundation
Westdene Sophiatown Residents Association
Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising
Workers World Media Collective
Woza Women in Leadership

P.S.

- Mazibuko Jara | DailyMaverick | 24 March 2020:
<http://aidc.org.za/a-programme-of-action-in-the-time-of-covid-19-a-call-for-social-solidarity/>