

11 March 2021

Statement

From the desk of the General Secretary, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana

SACC SHOCKED AT RAMPANT DISREGARD FOR HUMAN LIFE; CONDEMNS POLICE BRUTALITY

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is horrified at the use of brutality by the South African Police Service (SAPS) as a means of dispersing crowds, as evidenced by the scenes in Braamfontien and Auckland Park in Johannesburg on Wednesday, 10 March 2021 that resulted in the loss of human life.

This is following the death of a 35-year-old man who was shot by the SAPS in Braamfontien. The man is said to have been walking out of a clinic onto the street where the police shot at him, under the assumption that he was part of the student protests.

“The SACC has been a long-time advocate for comprehensive quality education, and has kept a close eye on the developments in the higher education sector,” said Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, General Secretary of the SACC. “As such, our concern at this time is two-fold; we continue to question if the strides being made in reducing the burden of debt on students is adequate to make a meaningful change in order to remove the barriers of entry for students seeking a higher education. The matter of historical debt and the challenge of registration fees has been with us for a long time, and it should not be a surprise item when the academic term begins,” he added. “We welcome the swift budget adjustments decided by Government to meet the pressing needs of students; and appeal for a long term solution to avoid the annual protests on something as basic as the right to education.” The SACC has a legacy in education that pre-dates 1994, of support to students in both secondary and tertiary education pursuits.

“Secondly, as advocates for social justice, we cannot stand by and witness police brutality of this level. There just should be no room at all; NOT AT ALL, for live ammunition to be used with unarmed civilians in any crowd control situation. You will remember that it was less than 90 days ago that we made a similar call when church-goers on a Sunday morning in the Vaal, were injured under similar conditions,” said Mpumlwana. “Even the protocol for the use of rubber bullets should be reviewed in the spirit of the human rights culture of our constitutional order,” he added. The SACC affirms the absolutely essential service of the SAPS, and frowns on public hostility towards their work in our communities.

Bishop Mpumlwana went on to add; “But also, we believe that the SAPS can serve and fulfil its duties to the public in the protection of the public themselves, and of public infrastructure, without what appears to be moments of careless disregard for the value and dignity of life.”

An expectation is being set at the doorstep of the SAPS, at the highest levels, to be accountable for its actions, and to review how crowd management and dispersal practices are implemented.

“As a country, we have seen far too many instances of questionable decision-making in crowd management and dispersal. This begs the question: Is this systemic within the DNA of the SAPS, as an unfortunate legacy of Apartheid?” said Mpumlwana.

The SACC believes that in the analysis of this, and other situations that have resulted in the loss of life at the hands of the SAPS, that a solution can be identified in order to ensure that the reputation of the SAPS is not stained with the blood of unarmed citizens.

—ENDS—

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About SACC

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is an ecumenical association of affiliated Christian Churches, and blocks of churches such as The Evangelical Alliance and the Council of African Independent Churches, and the International Federation of Christian Churches, with a mandate to lead common Christian action that works for moral witness in South Africa. SACC does not exist for the propagation and the advancement of its doctrinal position, but is the place where our diverse interpretations of our faith come together in action for **social justice**. It therefore seeks to achieve a visible, just socio-economic and ecological impact, enabled through engaged churches-in-community for a reconciled South Africa and our sub-continent.