THE ALL AFRICAN FEDERATIOIN OF CHURCHES RESPONSE TO THE CRL’S REPORT TO COGCTA AND CRLS MEDIA BRIEFING HELD IN JULY 2017

We, the All African Federation of churches and on behalf of our 2.3 million members reiterate our position of not supporting the report presented by the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) to COGTA and their recent media briefing last week.

The CRL has since 2015 at the onset of what they called an investigative study consistently ignored our calls for engagement including our correspondence stating our view against this so called investigative study on religious commercialization ad abuse of beliefs.

This investigation unfortunately had no distinct terms of reference and lacked a detailed scope which would give a clear picture of what areas of the church were to be investigated and what the outcomes would be at the time.

We, the All African Federation of Churches (AAFC) have made several unsuccessful attempts to remind the Commission of the many anomalies in the investigation. We further asked them to rectify their approach to the investigation in order to involve and put all key role players at ease, and not to create room for suspicions because of lack of transparency.

We must hasten to indicate that the leadership of the Commission was not receptive to our concerns and was blatant in their pronouncement of the fact that they will not be told what to do. This immediately presented the Commission with an attitude to alienate and target all affected parties.

The Commission presented an unwelcoming tone that demonstrated their intolerance to indigenous spiritual churches. They were set in their agenda of randomly summonsing the religious community especially the indigenous spiritual churches. For this we deemed it futile to participate in the process.

It must be noted that all the issues raised by ourselves with the Commission regarding our dissatisfaction and concern over how the Commission conducted this investigation were ignored. A case in point is a petition that was signed by over 20000 of our members that we submitted to the Commission which they refused to take.

We also made a subsequent attempt to request a meeting with the Commission leadership to no avail. The Commission consistently withheld information pertaining to aspects of investigation that we strongly felt we needed to challenge

Against this backdrop, we decided to await the conclusion of the investigation while we continued to make attempts to engage with the CRL leadership.

When the completion of the report was announced, we telephonically requested a copy thereof and this was denied. We sent a senior officer to their offices to request a copy and this too was denied even though some church leaders were provided with the copy. On questioning this prejudice, we were informed that they refused to share the report with us simply because we had not participated in the investigation.

Honourable Chairperson, our understanding is that the Commission is there to serve all people falling within the groups that belong to the communities that the CRL is established to serve without bias. We were astounded at being told that the report would be released to some and not to all. This concern of ours is shared by many structures across the religious community including ForSA and South African Council for Religious Rights and Freedom who have also publicly pronounced their disquiet on the irrationality of the CRL commission in its conduct.

We feel strongly about the Commission’s intent to target indigenous African churches and leaving out the so called conventional or Western denominations which the CRL commission seems very comfortable with.

Their repeated reference to the sale of paraphernalia and items was solely pointed and targeted at faith based spiritual churches and was meant to publicly demean congregants’ faith in healing practices.

This surely encroaches on citizen’s right to their belief systems. A dominant perception was created and hyped that there exists dishonesty, deceit within African churches.

The recent media briefing held by the CRL on its Final Report on the “Commercialization” of Religion and abuse of People’s Belief systems, including its recommendation for the Compulsory licensing of all religious practitioners and places of worship in South is a desperate move of the CRL Commission to continue confusing the South African publics of its true agenda and intentions.

As the All African Federation of Churches we would like to alert Parliament, the Publics of South Africa including the media that there exist serious concerns and objections among the vast majority of the South African Religious Communities including ForSA and the South African Council for Religious Rights and Freedom to mention a few, who consider the CRL’s proposals to establish an extensive national structure to be nothing else but a concocted intension to control and regulate all Religions including Religious Places of Worship. We point out the unconstitutionality of this intention by the CRL as this proposal effectively tantamounts to nothing else but the state capture of Religion in South Africa.

While we as the All African Federation of Churches and its country-wide members share the concerns with all South Africans about the persuasion of people by less than a handful of churches to ingest and use harmful substances, we support unequivocally the introduction of law to take its course in such circumstances, as we collectively believe that the South African legal system is more than sufficient to deal with such matters.

These concerns have been submitted to the CRL who has consciously ignored every submission detailing alternatives, viable and well supported solutions to every issue they have identified.

The All African Federation of Churches and its affiliates restate and underscore our concerns on the manipulative and bullying tactics utilized by the CRL in their quest to control and regulate religion in South Africa.

Below is a list of our concerns in this regard

1. We ask that Parliament reviews the lack of thorough, inclusive and transparent consultation that the CRL demonstrated by compelling handpicked church leaders to testify under duress. The damage caused to the dignity and integrity of the leaders who appeared and were publicly interrogated about ‘church offerings’ is unimaginable.
2. The refusal by the CRL to openly consult with us as key stakeholders of indigenous and spiritual churches greatly reduces the credibility of the study’s findings.
3. We ask that Parliament rejects the findings of the investigative study due to its lack of clear terms of reference.
4. We also ask that Parliament by the authority vested on it, not to accept the report of the Commission as it is not a fair and accurate reflection of the state of religious community in this country.
5. We register for Parliament to know that we reject any form of violation of our democratic rights as enshrined in our constitution where no religion is presented as assuming supremacy over others and that the CRL Commission does is nothing short of spitting to this profound right.
6. The Proposed Peer Review Committee purported to advise the CRL on how to regulate and license each religion has no standing and it flouts the CRL’s notion of self-regulation. This stance by the CRL is set to confuse and mislead the publics of South Africa. This raises the question as to what the CRL’s real agenda is.
7. The CRL proposes that umbrella organizations will advise whether or not their doctrine/practices of churches are acceptable. This notion negates the tenets of freedom on religion in South Africa and violates every aspect of this freedom.
8. While we support the mandate given to the CRL a Chapter

9 structure, we restate our stance of a vote of no confidence in the current executive of the CRL including its chairperson.

1. We maintain our position as the All African Federation of Churches that the majority of Religious organizations in South Africa are well equipped to address the concerns expressed in the CRL reports.
2. We condemn and oppose the proposal of the CRL to either regulate, control or capture religion in South Africa.

Further we call on Parliament to invite all Religious organizations to come and state their case without being prejudiced by the CRL who have gone beyond their mandate as stipulated in the CRL Act.