**Statement by Dan Plato, Executive Mayor of Cape Town

The Clifton beach saga – political opportunists and a sensationalist media**

4 February 2019

The lack of clarity around the actions of a private security company employed by local ratepayers; the exploitation of the situation by the ANC and their sub-bodies for political gain; and the media's insatiable appetite to sensationalise any whiff of racism for a front page story are what have brought us here today.

There is no question that with the atrocities committed under Apartheid and the painful memories that many of us still carry with us, that any talk of black and coloured people being forcefully removed from a beach can immediately rip open painful wounds from the past. Legitimate cases of racism must always be addressed, but what happened on Sunday, 23 December, was not a race-related incident. This is why, when I found out that people of all races (including black, white and coloured, and not particular race groups as was being claimed) were asked (not forced as alleged) to leave the beach on 23 December by a private security company due to safety concerns, I was so angered by the ANC's deliberate misrepresentation of the incident for political gain.

Subsequent to the events, I met with the security company, PPA, and the local ratepayers who hired PPA as a consequence of criminal activities on and around Clifton beach in the weeks preceding the incident under discussion, to hear them out and to explain where they may have overstepped. I also walked the beaches and engaged with a number of beachgoers about their experiences.

I learned that, on 23 December after sunset, two private security staffers began informing beach-goers that it was not safe to be on the beach after dark and, for their own safety, it would be in their interests to leave. No aggression was shown, and no particular race groups were singled out. Faiez Jacobs, the ANC Provincial Secretary, was on the beach that night and chose to issue a media release a day later with accusations about ‘reintroducing apartheid’ and ‘ending beach apartheid.’ He failed to concede that he had been free to stay at the beach if he chose to take that risk with his family, but, instead, he saw an opportunity to once again bang the racist drum against Cape Town. Nobody else had complained and no official complaints were received.

As a result of the accusations made, however, the City has reported the matter to the Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority (PSIRA), a nationally constituted body that governs the private security industry. Officers were called from their duties so we could gather the relevant information, taking them away from providing a service to the public. Officials took the time to compile reports, away from carrying out their duties in serving the people of this city. And we reported the matter so that it can be fully investigated by the appropriate structure to determine if any wrongdoing can be identified and addressed accordingly by PSIRA.

With the national government's year-on-year under-resourcing of the South African Police Service (SAPS) in the Western Cape – we have around 4000 less police officers than we should have in the province – many communities have chosen to turn to private security companies for protection, but these organisations do not have the same powers as local and national government’s law enforcement authorities. This is also not a trend that is unique to the Western Cape, and is seen across the country.

While the safety issues affecting our communities cannot be solved by policing resources alone, there is no question that we do need more resources, and this is why in the recent adjustment budget, the City committed to an additional R165 million for safety services so that we can recruiting more Law Enforcement staff for the City of Cape Town.

Social media has sadly established itself as the go-to battleground for those seeking to misrepresent information. With around 10 000 tweets and re-tweets involving the hashtag #ReclaimClifton on Friday, 28 December 2018, less than 50 ‘protesters’ showed up on Friday evening, with around the same number of ANC protesters showing up on Saturday. I was there on Friday to greet the protestors and tried to engage some of them but they had no interest in hearing anyone else’s view on the matter.

On that Friday ‘protestors’ also slaughtered a sheep on the beach, ignoring section 129. (1) of the Meat Safety Act, 2000 (Act No. 40 Of 2000) and Red Meat Regulations, which reads “A person who slaughters animals for indigenous religious or cultural purpose must - (a) obtain prior written permission thereto from the local authority of the area where such a slaughtering occurs.”

I implored the Deputy Provincial Police Commissioners on site to intervene, but they refused to do so, and as a result we are now taking their inaction to the Independent Policing Investigative Directorate (IPID) and the Western Cape Police Ombudsman. This means more paperwork, taking our officials away from their other duties, but we will always follow due process where the Democratic Alliance governs.

Another example of the ease with which information is first misrepresented on social media and then very quickly broadcast on mainstream media is a photo that was doing the rounds of city law enforcement so called ‘patrolling’ the beach with PPA Security. This photo was not taken on 23 December as so many claimed as evidence of the city’s ‘official and contracted relationship’ with PPA, but on 16 December when the city’s law enforcement returned from an anti-poaching operation, and PPA seeing our law enforcement, came down to the beach and walked alongside them.

The media, however, were happy to attach to their articles this photo of armed security and law enforcement, suggesting it was this group that was approaching beach goers. On the day in question there were only two private guards on duty, but it would seem that the majority of the media were not interested in the facts, with many claiming the photo as evidence in support of the ongoing misinformation being communicated.

In an age when fake news is drowning out the truth and sloppy reporting is turning away the public, our media have a responsibility to get the facts straight. It is in an environment of misinformation that political opportunists thrive and the media environment turns into a frenzy. Nobody should dance to the racist tune of the ANC.

With elections around the corner we are expecting to see more dangerous race baiting and political opportunism, which will all be at the expense of building unity. Thankfully, the truth eventually triumphs and we become better and more resilient at exposing the lies.

While the last week of 2018 was a painful reminder for many of a terrible and unjust past, I believe there are some positives to come out of this entirely avoidable and politically manipulated mess - the ANC have yet again exposed themselves as race-baiters with nothing else to offer the public and I hope more people have realised this; the media has shown that they need to shape up and be better - there was no racial profiling despite some headlines directly claiming this; and we as the City of Cape Town need to be more responsive, and we need to ensure our representatives give our communities the right information timeously.

The City of Cape Town is an inclusive city and while our country has a deeply divided past, the Democratic Alliance, where it governs, does everything in our power to build unity among our residents and to promote equality, inclusion and respect for all.

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