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SOUTH AFRICAN *Religious Forum*

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Greetings to the COGTA Portfolio Committee

The Impact of Disaster Management Regulations on the Religious Sector

We, The South African Religious Forum representing all interfaith and religious leaders nationally feel that all the pandemics that are taking place in South Africa constitute the disasters.

Historically the Religious leaders have played a pivotal role in shaping and giving the direction on societal norms and values. During biblical times Prophets would approach the rulers, the kings to alert them on the forthcoming disasters. The kings would listen as prophets were sent by God. Every human being is made up of three spheres i.e. the body, the mind and the soul/spirit. The Religious leaders represent the spiritual part of a person. No person exists without the spirit, meaning the system of beliefs whether traditional or non-traditional. The religion has played a crucial part in shaping the fabric of our society; hence the religious leaders are important in shaping, directing and directing the moral fibre of our society.

The religious sector is part and parcel of the disaster management; therefore we cannot be excluded in any regulations that govern society. When a person is sick, ill or dead, the religious sector plays a very important role. Our submission as religious leaders is that any form of regulation designed for the society, we the religious sector should be included. The last journey of a person on earth includes the religious leaders. No rituals or funerals can take place without the involvement of a pastor, preacher, guru, moulana etc. it has become a norm in any society that religious leaders lead these proceedings, from March 2020 to date all the funerals, prayers for people who succumbed to Covid-19 were led and conducted by the religious leaders.

We further submit that any regulations should be discussed and have a consultation with the religious sector. This can bring closure to the pain and the suffering that our society conjures on a daily basis. The exclusion of the religious sector on any disaster management regulations can be a serious omission and constitute an error. We, the religious leaders are appointed by God almighty to manage and monitor the spirituality of our people in South Africa. It brings us to a conclusion that we are part and parcel of the essential services in South Africa especially during the spread of this pandemic, the covid-19. We take cognisance of the fact that the religious gatherings are the super spreader of the disease, hence we take all the precautionary measures to sanitize, social distancing and the wearing of masks.



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We propose the following things for evaluation by the government:

- Religion be treated as an essential services
- Religious leaders be consulted on regulations and government gazette on disaster response
- Creating awareness
- Addressing gender based violence
- Using religious texts to bring hope and not fear

During harsh lockdown restrictions we saw number of gender based violence cases increase, food relief programs not reaching people that it was intended for. We feel as religious leaders can play a crucial role as essential services workers. The government has cautioned about a 3rd wave of covid-19 but there is no response or programs in place on how religious leaders can help the government fight the severity of the 3rd wave. Our message of hope and audience we reach can help convey correct and relevant message about the coming 3rd wave. Our power to promote unity and empathy is greater than that of the government for we are on the ground responding to the entire crisis. Religious leaders are actively involved with counselling those that lost their loved ones, which is not provided by the government, yet we are not treated as essential services workers.

We lastly bring to the attention of our government to consider any regulations to involve us as a religious sector. It is in our view that we deal with disasters on a daily basis. We should not be the last option to be consulted, considered in legislating any regulation, worse to exclude us.

We hope that this submission will receive a serious attention.

Yours in Religion

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