**National Assembly**

**Friday, 13 May 2022**

**Budget Vote 19: Social Development**

**Hon. LL van der Merwe, MP**

Hon. House Chairperson –

It is another year, and yet another Budget Vote and it will be the same script: the Minister outlining the progress made by the ANC-led Government. A craftful exercise in sugarcoating the truth and reality.

The reality being that South Africa ***is***in a perpetual crisis mode. We face a foster care crisis. An adoption crisis. A social worker crisis. A gender-based violence crisis. A substance abuse crisis. ***And***we face a leadership crisis.

***The truth being that despite countless promises***, and a 2018 Cabinet resolution to employ them, roughly 7 000 social workers trained by the state are ***still***sitting at home. NPOs are still underfunded, with many having had their budgets cut, leaving the elderly vulnerable. Our children still die on the killing fields of the gangster-ridden Cape Flats because there is no concrete plan to fight gangsterism.

***The***reality being that the Post Office - which is on the verge of collapse - and SASSA will possibly drive **us to yet another grants crisis**, with the announcement that due to unforeseen circumstancesand long queues, SAPO will no longer be able to pay the R350 grant.

Surely it is unforgivable that this Government would punish vulnerable citizens for its nightmarish long queues, all while it excels at paying grants to its comrades, officials, and those who do not qualify for a grant.

***The truth being that SASSA’s databases are so dysfunctional and broken. That it is not fit for purpose.***In 2021, over R200 million was lost on the payment of R350 grant, to people who didn’t quality for such.

Furthermore, many repeat findings by the AG, Minister, have not been attended to. Consequence management within this Department doesn’t exist. Taxpayer money, Minister, is being wasted and nobody is held to account. Investigations into fruitless and wasteful expenditure, **are never finalised.**

***THIS***is our reality.

We meet at a time when KwaZulu-Natal has suffered the most devastating floods in history. In the midst of this devastation, President Ramaphosa was quick to reassure the nation that his government, its officials and his party rank-and-file will not steal the relief meant for the poor.

His distress was not misplaced. During the Covid 19 pandemic, **leaders**stole food parcels. Thousands of Government officials, even those working in President Ramaphosa’s office and Treasury, stole the R350.

House Chairperson, ours the highest unemployment rate in the world. Grants therefore are a necessity, not an accomplishment.

Let’s be honest today, this rhetoric of the Government of expanding the comprehensive social security system is nothing more than the creation of a welfare state. 50% of South Africans already rely on a grant alone. We need a clear plan to lift our people out of poverty, not keep them trapped in poverty. The creation of a welfare state is nothing more than **an attempt by the ruling party to create a success story out of what is essentially the management of the poverty of our people.**

House Chairperson, in a speech to the White House, Auschwitz survivor Elie Wiesel asked, what is indifference? He then said, and I quote –

“*In a way, to be indifferent to suffering is what makes the human being inhuman… Indifference is not a beginning; it is an end. The hungry children and the homeless -- not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity, we betray our own*.”

Twenty-eight years after the dawn of democracy, children are dying of hunger. According to reports, close to 200 children died of malnutrition in January and February alone, with poor children being forced to eat plants or sand to fill their stomachs.

These children were not just mere statistics. Their lives mattered. They died of hunger, despite a welfare state, despite being born in a free South Africa, under a democratic dispensation. Nobody offered these hungry children a spark of hope; nobody responded to their plight. They were denied their humanity.

Chairperson, the Department sums up its own challenges well, in its APP on page 22. When it states that it is poor at the enforcement and implementation of Acts. That it is reactive to social ills. That it is ineffective at M & E. That it has poor oversight and governance over SASSA and NDA. That it has critical leadership vacancies. That there is a low absorption of social workers. And that it has poor performance and consequence management.

Minister, in order for us to support the Budget, the IFP calls on the Minister to table to Parliament - as a matter of urgency - a plan of action to absorb social workers. In addition, she should also table a plan of action to address her Department’s weaknesses, the AG’s findings, a plan to enforce a culture of consequence management and a plan to intensify the fight against fraud and corruption.

There is so much injustice. We cannot afford to be indifferent to the plight of the most vulnerable. For indifference is not a beginning; it is an end. Indifference will render us inhuman.