



Liaison, Dialogue and Research

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SALO stands in solidarity with SAITF and SERI SA

SALO wishes to join the voices in solidarity with the staff and representatives of the Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI) and the South African Informal Traders Forum (SAITF) concerning the actions of the City of Johannesburg's Member of the Mayoral Committee on Economic Development Councillor, Nkululeko Mbundu. In actions that constitute hate speech and defiance of a court ruling in favour of SAITF and SERI, the Councillor placed pictures and cell numbers of SERI staff members on social media and incited a spate of xenophobic attacks against them, endangering their lives.

The court ordered the reversal of the decision to evict illegal traders from the De Villiers trading precinct. Mr Mbundu's actions and hateful remarks threaten the lives of those who work tirelessly to bring dignity and protection to marginalised people. The injustice carried out against informal traders and their legal representatives, the xenophobic rhetoric and the blatant disregard of a court order, all go against our Constitution and endanger our democracy and the rule of law, which need to be protected at all times.

SALO stands against xenophobia and the targeting of informal traders and stands by all those who fight for a peaceful, just and fair society for all.

SALO welcomes the strong statement from the Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services calling upon the Information Regulator to investigate the actions of Councillor Mbundu in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act. The Ministry statement pointed out that "The MMC's tweets have incited threats of violence against Seri including, among others the burning down of Seri's offices, killing the lawyers who represented the informal traders and harm other Seri staff. As a result, Seri has had to temporarily close its offices".

Deputy Minister of Justice Mr John Jeffery, who leads the government's effort to put in place hate speech and hate crimes legislation and has spoken on many SALO platforms on the issue, said in the statement that "Every person has the right to have their case heard before a court of law. Legal practitioners represent their clients and the rights of their clients. They cannot and should not ever be harassed and intimidated for doing their jobs."

Attacks on non-profit, human rights organisations are increasingly frequent. This is particularly pernicious given that non-profit organisations have the primary objective of raising awareness of the plight of vulnerable and marginalised groups in our society and working toward alleviating violations of their fundamental rights. Against this context, the remarks of Mr Mbundu are dangerous and undermine the national project of regional integration and solidarity. Any attack on a human rights organisation is an attack on democracy itself.

Chair of the Board – SALO

The Right Reverend Rubin Phillip