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Media Alert

RE: A call to support the struggles of the Evicted People in Benoni

The Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET), an independent ecumenical organisation based in Johannesburg that works for socio-economic justice will lead a delegation of churches and civil society organisations to conduct a Pray Service and explore ways in which to support the evicted 75 families now living in the open veld near Albert Luthuli Extension 5, Benoni.

The plight of this vulnerable community was brought to our attention on eve of Human Rights last week by the local sympathetic television journalist who witnessed callous red ants destroying tents and taking seizure of families belongings. It emerge that the plot some lived on for more than 20 years was sold a few years ago and the residents were promised RDP houses by government. A number of years have passed without housing being provided and many of them have been moving from one place to another within the Ekurhuleni municipality. When they learnt that there was RDP houses that were empty in Chief Luthuli Extension 5, they occupied them. Unfortunately, when the news about the occupation of the RDP houses came to the knowledge of the municipality, the contractor in collaboration with the Department of Housing took the community to High Court which issued an eviction order for the community, sending them back to the streets. These families literally live in the open veld without any form of shelter because even the tents that they received from good Samaritans were ruthlessly rooted out by the red ants.

Subsequently, the situation has exposed women and children to health and criminal risks. Amongst the vulnerable groups living there are old women and children as young as 6 months, including orphans. Recently, one woman was attacked by stroke and rushed to hospital and was later discharged and returned back to the same open veld. In another incident, a woman was raped in the nearby bushes. The families have neither water nor sanitation in the land and they relieve themselves outside a dilapidated building that is not far from the area. This further increases the vulnerability of women and children and increases the risk of diseases, which resulted in a number of deaths. The situation is as equally, difficult to the children as they have to brave these challenging conditions to wake up from this open veld and be expected to concentrate at school.

Members of the Media are invited to attend and cover the Prayer Service that will be held as follows:

Date: 05 April 2010

Venue: Chief Albert Luthuli Park Extension 5, Benoni (Ekurhuleni Municipality)

Time: 10H00-11H30

Board of Directors: Bishop Ivan Abrahams: Chairperson; Rev Mautji Pataki; Rev Bafana Khumalo; Mr Eddie Makue; Rev Ebenezer Ntlati; Dr Graham Philport; Rev Desmond Lesejane: Executive Director

Churches working for Socio-Economic Justice