

## **A Solidarity Statement from Abahlali baseMjondolo for the Easter Monday Cloverdean Community Prayer Meeting**

Monday, 5 April 2010

We wish to thank ESSET, the Cloverdean Community and all participating churches, organisations and individuals for making this call for solidarity with the Cloverdean Community in Benoni, Johannesburg. Abahlali baseMjondolo believe it is necessary and just that in any normal society people who have a duty to God and to their country will not be silent in the face of oppression.

We have been informed about what has been done to you. It is incredible that while the politicians are celebrating 'Human Rights Day' the rich continue to use the state to wage war on the poor. We have been told how 75 families were evicted from the Cloverdean Farm where they had been living for more than 20 years. We have heard that old people and small babies are among those who have been driven from their homes and their land. We know that one of the elderly women of your community had a stroke out in the open land where you are now living and that she was discharged from the hospital back onto that open land. We have been made aware that one of the women of your community has been raped in the bushes. The difficulties faced by your children have been shared with us. Some of us know very well how it is to wake up on a piece of open land after a night of rain and to then have to get children clean and tidy to go to school.

Thembelela Njenga has told us that when the land that you were living on was sold a few years ago you were promised RDP houses but that this promise was broken. We understand that you responded to the breaking of this promise by occupying empty RDP houses in Chief Luthuli Extension 5. You were evicted from those houses by the court and had to return to the dirt and dangers of the empty lands. Three weeks ago good hearted well wishers who could not stand to see human beings living like cattle gave you tents. On Thursday last week the Municipality sent the notorious Red Ants to take the tents, and your money, sentencing you, for the third time, to life out on the open land without water, without toilets and without, they believe, hope.

Many of us have experienced similar attacks on our security and our dignity. Many of us have been attacked by municipal security, driven from our homes and left, like wild animals, in the bush. We suffered and we suffered and we hoped in vain and then we suffered again. Then we said **"Sekwanele!"** Our comrades in the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, in the Landless People's Movement and in the Rural Network have also decided that enough is enough. Once we had decided that enough was enough we began to build our movements. Each community must decide for themselves when they have reached the point of saying "Enough!"

We are in solidarity with every community that is under attack. Your suffering is our suffering. We are being brought together by this shared oppression. But we are also being brought together by the decision to resist. It seems that you also took that decision to resist when you occupied the RDP houses after your first eviction. Therefore we greet you as our comrades in the new struggle – the struggle to build the power of the poor against the rich and against the politicians. The road of struggle is very hard. It is very dangerous. But what other choice is there when the government that many of us struggled for and voted for turns on us?

We affirm that your right to the city is your right to all socio-economic opportunities. We affirm that your right to the city is your right to decide your own future. We affirm that none of us deserves to be treated with such contempt in any of our hard won cities. We know of the hidden price that the poor must pay in all of our cities to keep our place in our cities and we condemn this attack on the poor by the Ekurhuleni Municipality in the strongest terms.

What has been done to you it is not just immoral but it is also criminal. Our legal system has strong biases towards the rich but even our legal system recognises that it is a criminal act to render someone homeless without the provision of any alternative adequate accommodation. The Ekurhuleni Municipality and the Red Ants are criminals. This fact must be confronted directly. We call upon people that are near to you – churches, community organisations, trade unions, academics and NGOs, to take a side with you – not for you but with you.

We have noted that there have been so many instances in which the poor have had to pay the highest price for the right to the cities – the same cities that we build, we secure and we clean. It has become normal that the poor should have no place in our cities. Now it is the turn of the Cloverdean Community but it is clear that we will all have our turn to be evicted from our homes

and our places of work and to be beaten when we demand what is ordinary and basic – the right to be taken as human beings, to be treated with dignity.

We reject, clearly, the idea that others should interpret our struggles for us and without us. So many academics, NGOs and journalists never speak to us but tell the world that we are struggling for service delivery. We have refused to be seen as poor people who only want service delivery, a service delivery without justice and equality, a service delivery without respect and dignity, a service delivery with Red Ants, transit camps and cracked RDP houses in the middle of nowhere.

If we do not resist and challenge our exclusion from the cities with all means necessary we will find ourselves out in the open lands or the transit camps. It is high time that we must take all our places in all our cities without fear. Taking our place in our cities means holding the ground that we already have and taking more too. This will obviously mean that we must prepare ourselves to pay the price which some of us have already paid – attacks in the night, police beatings, being jailed, always being watched, lies – even being driven from our homes with the support of the police.

While you were evicted from your homes in Cloverdean the eThekweni Municipality was trying to evict us from our main streets and important public building when thousands of us wanted to march for Human Dignity in Durban on Human Rights Day. But we were many, we were united and we were not intimidated and so despite the heavily armed police force we were able to successfully and peacefully take our place in our city on that day.

Abahlali have always been warning that the anger of the poor can go in many directions. We continue to make this warning as we witness that all around the country struggling communities are taking to the streets. People are resisting all over our cities and all over the rural areas. People are refusing to be evicted from their land. People are refusing to be excluded from our cities' planning and are demanding to be able to exercise full citizenship. We need, in this time, to be very clear about what we are fighting for. We are not fighting over the crumbs that are thrown at us by the rich and the politicians.

We affirm that South Africa belongs to all who live in it and that we all have a responsibility to do whatever it takes to protect the future of our children and to reclaim our citizenship with all its entitlements. We must refuse those who want to take our humanity away from us with little offers of service delivery and bribery. We must refuse those who want us to fight each other over the crumbs. We must all fight for land and production to be shared equally and fairly without any heavy price being paid by the poor while taking the same rights that the rich take freely and safely.

Furthermore, just as the people from around our cities, our country and our world are uniting in support of our struggle we express our support for our comrades elsewhere who are being crucified by the upcoming FIFA World Cup. We have stood with, and we will continue to stand with our comrades from the Mitchell's Plain Concerned Hawkers and Traders Association in Cape Town, all the street traders in Durban and the National Informal Traders Forum, the South African Street Traders Association, the Diepsloot Informal Traders Association, MTC Traders Berea Mall, the Mall to Mall and all the Task Teams formulated to resist any attempts by the City of Johannesburg to evict them from their trading spaces. We will continue to stand with the Taxi Associations whose routes are banned and whose taxis are being impounded because the Department of Transport cannot issue them with Operating Permits. All this is being done to exclude all poor South Africans from benefiting from the World Cup so that our politicians can impress international dignitaries with how well they can oppress the poor. The true meaning of 'a world class city' is a city that oppresses its poor with high effectiveness – removing us, hiding us and breaking our struggles.

We do not want world class cities. We want cities for all – real people's cities. We have decided to resist these attacks on the poor and we invite you and all struggling communities and their allies, their real allies, those prepared to work with and not for the poor, to take this resistance forward.

We say that these attacks on the poor must come to an end. We affirm that your struggle to resist eviction, crime, hunger, starvation and eviction from your homes, trading plots and operating routes is just. We will stand with you against all forms of repression in your struggle for land and freedom.

**Amandla!**