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MEDIA STATEMENT

ATTENTION: EDITORS/JOURNALISTS

RE: ECUMENICAL SERVICE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC JUSTICE JOINS FORCES IN GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR TRADE JUSTICE

DATE: 09/10/2008

The Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET), an ecumenical mobilisation and advocacy agency will use its fourth Annual Conference on socio-economic justice scheduled to take place on the 15-16th October 2008 to be part of global campaign for trade justice.

The global Trade Week of Action which takes place during 12-19 October 2008, is an opportune platform afforded to the churches and the ecumenical organisations worldwide to advocate for among others trade justice, basic human rights, the rights to fair wages and dignified work, access to essential services like; water, healthcare, food etc.

Of particular significance is the need for churches and the ecumenical organisations in respective localities to heighten their awareness voices against undue socio-economic policies and advocate for just alternatives.

"Authorities don't have respect for informal traders despite the fact that 60% of people in the country are self-employed or employed by the informal business sector. In many parts of our country, the metro police assaults street traders, confiscate their goods and force them to shut down their businesses. We have been told of policies that empower authorities to harass us but nobody bothers to engage us or take us on board regarding those by-laws. We say nothing for us without us" a vehement Sam Kharibe, an informal traders speaking during the Informal Traders National Dialogue.

ESSET will focus its discussions on the role of informal trade in the quest for economic liberation for all at the said conference. The conference will hear the experiences of street, cross border and spaza shop traders; identify policy gaps impeding informal trade and develop strategies of how churches can be part of actions aimed at improving conditions for fair informal trading.

This focus emanates from ESSET's ongoing work with both local/informal traders and participation in global campaigns for just and free trade. ESSET considers informal trade as an integral component of the economic system and a fundamental tool in fighting poverty, sustaining as it does, the lives of millions of people in our country and the rest of the continent.

At this gathering, street traders from Johannesburg inner city, small township business and cross border in the region share their trade experiences and challenges. The conference will seek to expose obstacles prohibiting free trade at local and regional levels and explore strategies of how churches can accompany affected traders in their struggle for sustainable livelihoods.

Since its inception in 2005, the conference has become a platform for churches, ecumenical agencies, communities affected by socio-economic injustices and activists to dialogue on how to advance the churches' struggle for socio-economic justice.

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