



2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Khotso House, 62 Marshall Street, Johannesburg, 2001

P.O Box 62098, Marshalltown, 2107

Tel: 011 833 1190, Fax: 011 833 1076, info@eset.org.za

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

**ATTENTION: EDITORS/JOURNALISTS**

**RE: ON CURSED GROUND: TOWARDS THE REDEMPTION OF INFORMAL TRADE**

**DATE: 17/10/2008**

The Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET), an ecumenical advocacy organisation affiliated to the South African Council of Churches (SACC) met with church leaders, ecumenical agencies and street traders drawn from the innercity of Johannesburg and Soweto at its fourth Annual Conference at the Birchwood Hotel in Benoni yesterday.

"The predicament of informal traders across the country and in cross-borders is an insinuation that God want us to act in whatever way possible to assist the informal traders. It is high time that the churches stand up in solidarity with informal traders who despite very difficult economic, political and social conditions, continue to struggle to make a living for themselves and their families instead of waiting for handouts from government or resorting to criminal activities," said one of the church leaders in attendance at the conference, Bishop Lungaka Siboto, Presiding Bishop of the Ethiopian Episcopal Church and a member of the National Executive Committee of the South African Council of Churches (SACC).

Rev. Sox Leleki of the Methodist Church in Tembisa encouraged informal traders to be confident and take pride in the special service they render. He added: "Even in the garden of Eden God expected Adam to make means with what was at his disposal to ensure that he and his family have a meal at the end of the day. When you conduct your business do not put more emphasis of making a profit because trade is not all about accumulating more money, it's about about sustainable living and a service to others. Once you can serve others best, God will have no problem in turning your spaza shops into a complex mall sooner than you expected".

The church leaders guaranteed informal traders that they will walk with them in the struggle of their sector and that the churches will further look into mobilising for traders support in their respective denominations. Though informal traders were assured of accompaniment from churches, ecumenical organisations and partners, they insisted that they would not expect solutions from the church or church leaders. The churches and ecumenical organisations including ESSET believe that traders must play a leading role in advocating for unjust and unfair trade system as a demonstration for being the most aggravated.

The conference noted that informal trade contributes to the GDP of the country, offers employment opportunities and supports family. It affirmed that this is a legitimate form of trade.

Conference noted the constraints impeding informal trade and committed churches to joining traders in their struggles to overcome these. They include:

- Continuing harassment by authorities, especially the Metro police;
- Their exclusion from policy formulation processes
- Poor infrastructure which lacks adequate health amenities and security;
- Lack of access to capital;
- City by-laws that resents access to free and just trading and contradicts national provisions of the Business Act of 1991
- Endemic corruption in the sector, including at the borders for cross border traders

ESSET's work is intended to benefit the church community in South Africa with special focus on developing the capacity of the clergy, women and youth leaders to understand and engage with socio-economic issues.

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**Enquiries: Thabo Koole**  
**Tel: 011 833 1190/Cell: 078 5515 954**