



2nd Floor, Khotso House, 62 Marshall Street, Johannesburg, 2001

P.O Box 62098, Marshalltown, 2107

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

MEDIA STATEMENT

ATTENTION: EDITORS/JOURNALISTS

RE: PRAYER MEETING FOR INFORMAL TRADERS

DATE: 18/06/2008

The Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET) and South African Council of Churches today facilitated a prayer meeting, where clergies, women and the church fraternity came together to pray for the informal traders ahead of their National Dialogue scheduled for 19-20 June 2008.

During the prayer service held at the Khotso House Chapel, the informal traders were affirmed of the vital role they play in contributing to the country's economy as well as in fighting joblessness. Addressing the gathering, Rev Sox Leleki spoke strongly against the church's failure to make the government accountable to ensure that there was justice for all. "It's regrettable that there are many in government leadership who are there not to create equal opportunity for all but primarily to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor. Very few of our leaders are willing to sacrifice for the people who elected them to leadership, instead their focus is on how much they will profit," said Rev Leleki.

Rev Leleki further indicated that it was at times like this that pertinent questions needed to be asked: "Where is the church when informal traders are harassed and ripped off their dignity in their business environment? Where is justice when even the crumbs are taken away from the table of the poor?"

In his message of support to the gathering, Rev Morwaeng Motswasele of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa said: "The struggle of the informal traders in this country is a struggle for human rights and recognition for their sector, which also needed to be treated with dignity,"

Mr Malcolm Damon of Economic Justice Network Fellowship of Christian Councils in South Africa in his statement said: "Informal traders provided the basic services needed by many households and individuals at reasonable prices. You provide bread, vegetables, fruits, fast food and daily necessities of life".

Lastly, Bishop Paul Verrein of the Central District Methodist Church of South Africa said in his statement: "We note with deep shame the scourge of xenophobia that has disgraced our entire nation in this last month. We are deeply conscious of the huge

disparity between rich and poor in this nation. That there is one poor person on the streets of the city that is lined with gold, is a betrayal of all we stand for as South Africans. We call on the Church to keep its door of compassion open and to insist on its prophetic preferential option for the poor”.

One of the informal traders, Mr Sam Khasibe responded by saying: “As informal traders, we are appreciative for the political freedom we enjoy in this country. However, very little has been done to ensure that the economic policies of this country afford the the poorest of the poor and the marginalised an equal access to economic opportunities. We are more than delighted that whilst we will be deliberating during our National Dialogue, your prayers will be with us”.

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Enquiries : Mr Thabo Koole

078 5515 954