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Media Statement

From the office of Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, General Secretary of the SACC

SACC APPEALS FOR CALM IN THE MIDST OF VIOLENCE & LOOTING

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) notes with deep concern the violence and destruction of property that is engulfing our nation as we speak. This violence is resulting in untold suffering. This, in many quarters in our society, is explained and justified based on the recent court decisions as they affect former President Jacob Zuma.

There are some who genuinely believe that Mr Zuma was denied justice; others explain that he was given enough space to express himself in the judicial system which he rejected. Regardless of what anyone believes, and whether, the public protests result from our limited understanding of the complicated legal processes or not, is beside the point. The reality is that the protests arising from this have opened the space for large scale criminality that is fed by poverty, a nothing-to-lose mindset and the deep-seated anger in the absence of hope. In this we now have wanton destruction and even the possible involvement of organised crime whose purpose will be to permanently undermine the country's institutions. In this category are those who seek to target strategic installations, which takes the problem to another level of calculated lawlessness.

Are these the conditions under which Mr. Zuma's freedom should be pursued, outside of the law? Are there both legal and humanitarian conditions under which his imprisonment for contempt of court, can be reviewed - where justice and mercy kiss (Psalm 85:10); and yet ensure not to undermine the constitutional underpinnings of South Africa? That is what the courts are addressing. The Constitutional Court is sitting today to hear his request for his sentence to be rescinded and reversed, and no action should seek to interfere with that process and its outcomes. Any options available to Mr Zuma beyond the court processes will not be helped by the public violence and criminality. We are a human rights society, which provides for the right to protest. But the rights we enjoy must be exercised with responsibility. And this is not the way to go.

What do we see? We learn that many of the trucks that were destroyed at Mooi River, are owned by black entrepreneurs who have now lost everything and all the livelihoods that depend on that industry will go to destitution and may not be able to get out of debt. The infrastructure we are losing will not be replaced overnight.

The SACC urgently appeals for an end to the violent protests spilling into criminal acts of wanton vandalism and looting that should not be sustained in a constitutional democracy. A nation, whose legal and constitutional institutions are challenged through violence, will take decades of deep suffering, if ever, to recover.

The destruction we are witnessing will have far-reaching and long-lasting impacts. It is a state of civil anarchy and mayhem that cannot and should not be tolerated. We appeal for a moment to stop.

We commend the police for their restraint in handling this vandalism under extreme provocation and physical threats. As policing is totally overwhelmed and the military step in to curb the destruction, we may yet again face a different challenge of the potential militarisation of our society with regrettable outcomes. We must reverse this and stay at home!

All this happens in the thick of the third wave of COVID-19 that is bound to take its toll in this environment. This country has lost close to 65,000 lives to the pandemic. These are people's family members, parents, relatives, daughters and sons; affecting many highly regarded leaders in other sectors - political leaders, traditional leaders, amakhosi, cultural, religious, business, and other social luminaries of our society. This has left many orphaned children where all adults have been wiped out. We shudder to think of the toll of death that might result from the current unprotected hordes of people, where the wrath of COVID-19 can kill both the economy and large numbers of people, leaving untold misery in many families.

After the burning anger has subsided, people will be desperately seeking the supplies that they need for their daily living, and these will not be accessible. The people employed in these commercial centres will be without jobs for some time, during which they will not be able to support their families. An economy in junk status will barely be able to crawl back to its feet. Prices of all commodities and supplies are bound to go up and bite further into the food security of poor people.

The culture of violence is embedded in South Africa and has almost been normalised; we are reaping the fruits of decades of the language of violence. In the open media environment, both the social media and the mainline media and TV serve both to inform as well as to further incite and promote the mayhem.

A major part of this culture is fed by the depth of poverty and hunger of a huge section of the population - with astronomically high levels of youth unemployment compounding a sense of hopelessness. Added to this is the toxicity of our politics that sloganise very complex matters and offer no nationally embracing solutions.

Even on the Coronavirus pandemic we no longer have a common voice of the political parties in our Parliament - what began as regular consultations for a measure of agreement on some basics has not been sustained and COVID-19 management is now a matter of the opinion of the loudest political voice.

We appeal to all communities in every province where these actions are brewing to scale back; take stock before it is too late. We must protect our economy and the constitutional systems and institutions of our country for the benefit of all and for our future.

South Africa has to summit past this toxic dissonance upon which mayhem thrives, and move to a post-COVID-19 and post-looting dispensation where our national institutions are preserved in service; with predictable and equal justice for all; with food, shelter and the opportunity for all to advance from poverty to decent living. That will require serious attention to the national economic architecture. But we must stop the mayhem right now.

We appeal to government to do all in their power to protect property and livelihoods. And to bring stability to our country while looking to establish a new plane of engagement to reduce the space for criminals to exploit any genuine life grievances of the population.

We stand for the values of selfless love and peace with the equitable justice that gives and preserves life, especially for the poorest of our people. In the current situation we call for earnest prayer for our country and its people buffeted by this situation. We are all South Africans together; we sink or swim together, peace is the foundation of social and economic stability; for this we commit to pray.

—ENDS—

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About SACC

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is an ecumenical association of affiliated Christian Churches, and blocks of churches such as The Evangelical Alliance and the Council of African Independent Churches, and the International Federation of Christian Churches, with a mandate to lead common Christian action that works for moral witness in South Africa. SACC does not exist for the propagation and the advancement of its doctrinal position but is the place where our diverse interpretations of our faith come together in action for **social justice**. It therefore seeks to achieve a visible, just socio-economic and ecological impact, enabled through engaged churches-in-community for a reconciled South Africa and our sub-continent.