



Press Release
19 August 2020

THE PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA, MR. CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, WATER AND SANITATION, MS. LINDIWE SISULU

**MINISTER OF CO-OPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS, D R. NKOSAZANA
DLAMINI ZUMA**

THE NATIONAL DISASTER WATER COMMAND CENTRE

THE NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT COMMAND STRUCTURE

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, COMMISSIONER MOHAMED SHAFIE AMEERMIA

REGARDING: Solidarity with Water Stressed Communities – National Day of Action
#WaterForAll

The importance of water cannot be emphasised enough. Beyond the central role that water plays in sustaining human life, the COVID-19 pandemic has further affirmed the role of water in maintaining health and wellness. Specifically, through its function in helping to curb the spread of the virus. Without water, the spread of the virus could be far greater. In a televised address on Saturday the 15th of August, the President of South Africa declared that although lockdown restrictions will be eased, this does not diminish the risk of infection nor should it mean that society lowers its guard.

However, many water-stressed communities do not have access to clean water and many live without running water through taps in their homes. This means that their water needs have to be met through polluted rivers, faraway standpipes or rapidly depleting boreholes. Women perform the care labour in this context risking their safety in many of these situations. Moreover, many communities only have intermittent water access due to local government mismanagement. Although the government has now handed the responsibility for managing the virus to its citizens, it has done this in a manner that sets them up for failure. Simply put, water needs of communities are not met, based on the constitutional and legal responsibility that the state has. Exercising individual responsibility is made impossible without water.

To date, the South African National Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) has shared, publicly and with the Department of Human Settlement, Water and Sanitation, four reports on water-stressed communities, based on our community-driven self-reporting tool which so far over 90 communities (see: <https://www.safsc.org.za/water-stressed-communities-map/>) have utilised. In all four previous reports, SAFSC called on the Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation to be responsive and to act decisively to meet the needs of these communities. Unfortunately, up to now SAFSC has not had any response from the Minister, nor has the Minister indicated publicly or to the specific communities listed in the previous reports, that any action will be undertaken to provide water.

It is for this reason, that SAFSC has asked the Legal Resources Centre to issue a legal letter demanding that the Minister immediately procure water, water tanks, and installation of tanks and/or fix tanks in terms of directive 7 of the Water and Sanitation Emergency Procurement Directives of the Disaster Management Act to avert a water crisis in the affected communities; as well as to commence with the processes outlined in section 63 of the Water Services Act, 108 of 1997 to have either the Provincial Departments of Water or the National Department of Human Settlement, Water and Sanitation to take over the functions of the various water service institutions where the affected communities are situated in order to make sure that there is water provided on a long term basis to such communities. If the Minister fails to undertake the actions described above, court action compelling her to do so may be considered and taken.

Moreover, given the frustration in water-stressed communities, these communities have called for and organised a national day of action, together with the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, to highlight their plight and make their demand of #WaterForAll. Some of their demands include:

- Every house to have a tap with clean drinking water;
- Where are our water tanks?;
- Fix the boreholes;
- Forensic audits now of Municipal Government Finance;
- Polluters of our water commons must pay;
- Top up the water tanks;
- Unlock the water commons

Essentially communities are demanding their constitutionally-enshrined rights be affirmed by a democratic government. These are demands that must be met. The people need to wash their hands, but the government cannot wash its hands of the people.

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