



ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS STATEMENT ON THE COVID-19 DEVELOPMENTS

Thursday, 28 May 2020

On the 24th of March 2020, the President of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa announced a nationwide lockdown which was to begin on Thursday the 26th of March 2020 as a measure to contain the spread of COVID-19, a highly contagious disease which can easily cause deaths of so many people if not contained. When the President made this announcement, South Africa had 402 cases of COVID-19 with zero fatalities, and infections in the whole world were 340 000.

After the declaration of the lockdown, we all united in affirming the decision of a lockdown as a measure of preventing the COVID-19 catastrophe which has potential to devastate humanity in a manner equal to or more than 1918 Spanish Flu. The Spanish flu infected more than 500 million people globally and killed close to 100 millions of them. During this crisis, World leaders ignored scientific advice and instead focused on the 1st World War with little regard to the lives of millions of people who were killed by the pandemic.

The Economic Freedom Fighters is a revolutionary movement contesting for political power through a democratic defeat of the incumbent political organisations adhered to the call for lockdown because it made scientific and epidemiological sense. We are an organisation that is at all times guided by scientific observations and theory; hence we make better political and ideological sense than all other political parties in South Africa.

In keeping with social distancing and adhering to the lockdown, we closed all our 53 regional offices, 9 provincial offices and head office and further cancelled all activities which would have brought us closer to winning political power from the incumbent Government. We did so because we appreciate that we cannot and should not sacrifice people's lives on the altar of political convenience and opportunism. We refused to respond to even the most provocative temptations of the ruling party using its Councillors in party colours to distribute food parcels from Government and donors. We called on all our members to adhere to the lockdown regulations.

The EFF further contributed R6 million to the Government established Solidarity Fund. Our contribution used 33% of each of the EFF's Public Representatives' salaries. A commendable sacrifice from poor and struggling fighters who put the lives of our people above their immediate personal needs. We also supported artists who have worked with the EFF since 2013, because we believed in making the lockdown work for everyone.

When we did this, South Africa had less than 1000 infections, and there were still no deaths reported. We are speaking here today, South Africa has more than 25 000 people who were infected by COVID-19, and 540 people of these have died. In the world, more than 5,6 million people have been infected with the Coronavirus, and 350 000 of those have lost their lives.

The world and all medical and pharmaceutical specialists have not yet developed a solid medical solution to the pandemic, and there is evidence that very little is known about the disease. Despite all lockdown measures, infections and death figures continue to rise all over the world, except in Cuba, which has not reported any deaths in the past 10 days.

SABOTAGE OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

Throughout the lockdown, the financial sector was never forced through national regulations to give all deserving workers payment holidays for three months. As a result,

many people continued to pay insurance, medical aids, bonds and loans, including rents and instalments.

This inevitably weakened their ability to focus on essentials during the lockdown. Furthermore, small businesses faced evictions from the premises of their operations because banks never stopped to demand monthly payments from a people in a crisis, under lockdown due to Covid-19.

After 21 days of the lockdown, private white monopoly capital launched a campaign against the lockdown, using the media and fly-by-night research and lobby groups. This campaign discredited the lockdown strategy, demanded alcohol and cigarette sales, whilst claiming that more people will die of hunger than Covid-19. Yet the employed people could not provide for themselves because the financial sector kept bleeding them, setting them up against the collective interests of the lockdown. In addition, the unemployed, on the other hand, were already guaranteed social grants, including the social relief fund, however imperfect.

Covid-19 has proven to be indiscriminately deadly amongst communities with no access to healthcare and adequate housing. This is why in the United Kingdom and the United States, where the majority of the populations are white, black people account for the highest proportion of Covid-19 fatalities.

The lockdown was supposed to give the country space and time to fix the public healthcare system, which was already overburdened by pre-existing diseases. Over 80% of the country's population depends on hospitals and clinics facilities provided for by the Government. Many of these facilities are dilapidated, under-resourced and understaffed. For many years now, to go to a public hospital in South Africa is to go to die and not to be saved from illness.

Government has not renovated any hospital or given any significant improvements. Admittedly, even the misguided "events based temporal" quarantine centres will not meet

the demand that is coming. In essence, our healthcare is not ready to give the poor and the black majority a fighting chance over Covid-19.

The white community and some insignificant minority blacks elite will rely on private healthcare; which are fully functional, fully resourced and ready to give them a fighting chance. Many of them will recover, not because they have better immunise systems, but because of quality healthcare. However, people in black communities who could have lived another 10 years, will die. Not because they have bad immune systems, but because they did not get healthcare.

The lockdown was also supposed to help uplift close to 2700 communities out of informal settlement conditions without adequate housing, sanitation, water and refuse removal. This is because you cannot fight Covid-19 in a community where there is no sanitation. Where children play on the same street sands where refuse water is thrown after a bath or washing of dishes.

As the lockdown ends, there are even more people in these conditions because others were evicted due to demands of rents and other payments. In addition, the homeless will be returning to streets with schools reopening.

Furthermore, South African white monopoly capital has no history of guaranteeing occupational health and safety for black workers. In fact, many white bosses think black people do not deserve to work in hygiene, safe and healthy conditions. This is why TB remains a problem to this day in the mines, and no single mineworker has medical aid to access quality private healthcare treatment.

The mines are also notorious for forcing workers to dig into the belly of the earth even when the science tells them it is risky. But because they are driven by profit, they have always put the lives of our people at risk. This is why Impala Platinum Mine in Limpopo

has already seen the infection of 13 workers within a week of premature reopening. In Mponeng Mine in Gauteng, more than 53 workers have already tested positive.

Nothing will make white monopoly capital protect workers from Covid-19 today when they did not do so for centuries. Nothing will make the domestic workers enjoy occupational health and safety in those white homes today when they have not enjoyed it for many centuries.

Moreover, the overcrowded, dilapidated public transport facilities have also not been adequately renovated and expanded. Over 8 million workers, more than 2 million Grade 12 and 7 learners are expected to rely on the same facilities. All this will occur within a generally weak Covid-19 testing capability. As things stand, Government has never even delivered the 30 000 tests a day it promised. Many black people will get sick, they will die, and no one will know how, because their lives do not matter. They will not even get the recognition of being counted in the Covid-19 fatality and infection statistics.

It is therefore rational to see why even the World Health Organisation attested to the scientific fact that South Africa is not ready to end the lockdown. However, despite publicly declaring that the Government's Covid-19 response will be guided by science, the President decided to bow to the selfish pressure of private white monopoly capital. This is because if all our people were given payment holidays, guaranteed social grants, free water and electricity, then the only people who were losing were the capitalists. Because they were not making a profit; as a result, they sabotaged the lockdown.

By telling the whole country that "it is now in your hands"; Ramaphosa was rendering his resignation as captain of the ship, the number one citizen and commander in chief. He turned his back on his constitutional oath to protect human rights, chief amongst which is the right to life. He was telling us that he is no longer in charge. He has surrendered the country to the looming Covid-19 catastrophe, for the benefit of white monopoly profit interests.

This means we are back to the 1970s and 1980s when black people were on their own, and the liberation movement was in exile, prison or underground. In those days, our people were forced to face the enemy on their own. Just like the young children of 1976 had to put their own bodies on the line and face the enemy with stones. Today, the children of black people are being sent out to risk their lives without any fighting chance. Any black child who contracts Covid-19 will go back to their overcrowded homes where they live with grandparents and dish the virus to them. All these people will face this horrible death alone because there is no hospital for them, no ventilators, doctors or medication to help them fight for their lives. Government has abandoned them.

LOCALISATION

The continued importation of disposal masks does not make sense since these will be needed for the foreseeable future. The Government should give offtake agreements to local manufacturers of all PPEs, and direct the Industrial Development Corporation, PIC, and all developmental finance institutions to provide industrial finance and partnerships to local manufacturers who will manufacture PPEs for the domestic and continental market. If this was done since March, all PPEs would be coming from South Africa, therefore creating additional jobs for many unemployed people.

If there is any importation that should happen during this period, it must be importation of manufacturing and industrial machinery to produce for ourselves and the continent. If there is any importation that should happen during this period, it must be importation of natural resources that cannot be naturally found in South Africa. The African continent must disabuse itself from a nonsensical belief that all finished products with use-value must be made in Europe, US or China.

The Government must commission locally developed INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM that will enable some of the meetings to take place online, and this must be extended to cover schools. Why are we entirely dependent on

American systems for communication and online interaction? Have we even tried to test South African made models and systems of communication?

REDRESS DURING THE LOCKDOWN

Section 9 (2) of the CONSTITUTION places an obligation on Parliament to pass redress laws and says explicitly **“TO PROMOTE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EQUALITY, LEGISLATIVE AND OTHER MEASURES DESIGNED TO PROTECT OR ADVANCE PERSONS, OR CATEGORIES OF PERSONS, DISADVANTAGED BY UNFAIR DISCRIMINATION MAY BE TAKEN”**. The EFF will go to court to defend this principle because the right-wing political parties that represent white interests are trying by all means to undo the redress legislation, and this must not be allowed. COVID-19 pandemic does not take away the State’s obligation to redress the economic injustices of the past.

REOPENING OF PARLIAMENT

We demand the reopening of Parliament in Pretoria, Tshwane Events Centre because Government must be overseen and Government and all its entities are in Pretoria, and as opposed to Cape Town, majority of Members of Parliament will be able to gain access to Pretoria. The current system of accountability limits the time dedicated to holding the executive accountable.

Since the lockdown, the President and Deputy President have not responded to questions from anyone, not even from the media, and Parliament is the only platform where we can ask questions to the President. A democratically elected president must be held accountable because South Africa is not a village and a president is not a despotic Chief who cannot be held accountable.

GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL RELIEF PACKAGE

On the 21st of April 2020, the Government announced what they called a massive social relief and an economic support package of R500 billion. On closer examination, this R500 billion is a R200 billion loan guarantee scheme, meaning that businesses that wish to borrow money from private banks will be guaranteed by the State. In the immediate, the white-owned and controlled banks will be the primary beneficiaries of this loan guarantee scheme. R130 billions of this R500 billion is budget re-prioritisation, meaning that it is not a new financial injection, but the money that will be shifted to activities that will not happen due to COVID-19 into efforts to fight the virus. **The Minister of Finance has still not presented a revised budget in this regard.** R70 billion are tax deferrals, meaning that companies that were supposed to file their tax returns during this period will be allowed by SARS to pay their taxes later.

R40 billion are payments which will be made by the Unemployment Insurance Fund, which is primarily the money of workers they paid when they were employed with a contractual commitment that they will be paid when they are no longer employed.

What this means is that the only new injection is between R90 billion and R100 billion, which Government does not have in its current finances, hence their intention to approach the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the New Development Bank (BRICS BANK).

The South African Reserve Bank has since the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the capital adequacy requirements for banks, reduced the repo rate by 250 bases points to 3.75%, SARB has largely been friendly to huge corporations. In the final analysis, the financial services sector, particularly banks, have been the biggest beneficiary of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We reject the IMF and World Bank loans and instead demand that Government should defer its debts repayments to different financial institutions that have borrowed money to

the State. In the 2019/20 budget, Government allocated more than R200 billion to service its debt obligations, so instead of borrowing additional money to meet its immediate challenges, Government should defer the debt repayments, **and such will immediately avail an additional R200 billion into the State**. Financial institutions that have borrowed money to the State are run and controlled by individuals who must appreciate that we are in a crisis and should focus all our energies into the crises.

Furthermore, the South African Revenue Services should pay retrospective and detailed attention to the phenomena of aggressive tax avoidance which had defined South Africa for many decades. Revenue collection will certainly shrink due to reduced economic activity, but there are billions of Rands shifted to tax havens by multinational corporations on an annual basis that do business in South Africa.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS

We have since welcomed the marginal increases in social grants and introduction of basic income grant and demand that these must be made permanent. The reality is that the post CORONA period will take unemployment to above 50% of people who are capable of working, and with no income, they will need assistance.

We also note that the department of social development intends to resuscitate CPS and NET1 through a company called GOVTECH, and this is against the findings of the Constitutional Court against these entities. The CORONA Virus must not be used to undermine the Courts.

Despite this, Government has still not come with a clear plan and strategy and plan on the payment of the R350 per person because millions of unemployed youths who are not in education and training have no bank accounts, and these are the poorest of the poor.

12 MONTHS MORATORIUM ON HOUSE AND CAR REPOSSESSIONS

We call for a moratorium of 12 months on the house and car repossessions by private banks because many people are going to lose their jobs and should not be condemned to absolute poverty and homelessness because of a pandemic that they did not create. We demand that banks must be prevented from house repossessions because unemployment will soon exceed 50% and it cannot be justifiable that during a crisis, banks repossess houses and cars of retrenched workers. Instead of enriching the white-owned and controlled banks, Government should guarantee the mortgages of ordinary people so as to prevent undue evictions and repossession of houses during a crisis.

END ALL EVICTIONS, GUARANTEE DECENT SHELTER, ANF HEALTHCARE FOR ALL

Regulations that prevent evictions during lockdown must be extended for a further 12 months. We call on municipalities to abide by the law and regulations, and not act as if they are above the law by conducting illegal evictions. Should any of the municipal officials insist on carrying out evictions when they are prohibited by law, we will go to court and call on the court to make them responsible for damage to personal properties.

This is the time to bring the spotlight back to the decent shelter for all. This pandemic showed all of us that high density and unplanned informal settlements are not sustainable. This is an opportunity for society to re-organise itself, it's economy and use this opportunity to depopulate congested informal settlements. Our people are not born in informal settlements; they go there looking for jobs. As part of the localisation strategy, this is the time to build new factories in places with less infection rate and build with them new decent homes.

Our people will go and live where there are jobs. To build these new settlements areas, we must use digital construction systems technology and leverage on innovation. We can build decent homes with spacious gardens, streets, sanitation infrastructure and recreational facilities closer to places of work.

Furthermore, we demand universal health coverage through the nationalisation of all private hospitals. All our people must be able to access healthcare at any healthcare institution in the country. No one should be allowed anymore to make a profit out of disease and illness.

ABUSE OF POWER MY SANDF AND SAPS

We have noted the tragedy of the death of Collins Khoza. Findings made by the Pretoria High Court have indicated that he was severely assaulted by the members the defence force, while those of the Johannesburg Metro Police were present but did nothing to prevent the assault.

Not many know that since his death, the EFF has been working closely with the family, and the legal team to ensure that justice is done and that no stone is left unturned. We will continue on this journey, including challenging the blatant cover-up of the report of the Board of Inquiry released yesterday. That report is not worth the paper it is written on. It is replete with nonsensical findings, contradictions and evasions.

We will continue supporting the Khoza family and the legal team to pursue a compensation claim against the Government, and if our lawyers advise, join the case in our own name as EFF. Those within the army and police in South Africa must know that their first duty is the protection and not killing of an armed and defenceless people.

SCHOOLS

As stated in our previous media statement, the EFF believes that schools must not be opened because the following non-negotiable conditions have not complied within the majority of South Africa;

1. A scientific and epidemiological illustration that the spread of the virus has been contained, the curve flattened in South Africa.

2. Guaranteed quality healthcare facilities and systems for all schools.
3. Guaranteed infrastructure for teaching and learning, including additional classrooms, which could be converted to public halls, mobile classes and other safe public spaces which will ensure that the teacher to learner ratio is 1:20.
4. Guaranteed social distancing spaces, including assembly points and food retail spaces where human contact will be completely prevented.
5. Complete discontinuation of contact sporting activities.
6. A well-coordinated system of sanitisations and supply of key essentials which must be administered by the department of health, because it will be impossible to expect teachers to administer healthcare precautions added to the fact that with stratified classrooms, the core business of teachers, will increase.
7. Guaranteed clean water supply for all school.
8. Guaranteed sanitation, emphatically clean toilets for all schools, including those that did not have toilets before the advent of COVID-19.
9. Safe and reliable public and scholar transport system which will ensure that learners keep a social distance.
10. Introduction of technology which will lessen the time learners spend in physical schools and integrated into the technological form of teaching and learning. Maximal usage of technology as a method of teaching and learning should constitute the core of what Government adopts as part of the policy and practice of education in South Africa.

RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS

We, as the EFF fully respect the right of religious institutions to gather and worship in common spaces, we, however, appeal to all religious leaders to exercise this right with maximum caution and respect of life. Religious leaders who care about the wellbeing of their people should not rush into religious gatherings because these will compromise the health of their members. Religion and worshipping are not banned in South Africa, and religious leaders know that religious rights can be exercised without gatherings of many people.

STATE BANK

The Government should finalise the establishment of a State Bank, and as we said, the African Bank must be the nucleus of the State Bank. Private Banks have been benefitting from the money of the State, which if there was a State Bank would have been redirected to useful programmes of the State. In the immediate, we demand that all social grants and salaries of public servants must be cleared and paid through the AFRICAN BANK, which must be later transferred to full STATE OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL.

We make all these demands because we know that in times of crises, private capitalists will not come to the party and they will not stop their ruthlessness because even when there is no crisis, they treat our people with disdain and ruthlessness.

STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISES:

While society is focused on efforts to save lives from the Covid-19 pandemic, Pravin Gordhan and his cronies are trying to dispense of public assets like SAA and SA Express. This will lead to tens of thousands of workers losing their jobs and livelihoods. There is not a business anywhere in the world that is not facing challenges since December of 2019 due to Covid-19. This is particularly worse for businesses that were trying to implement recovery strategies.

Pravin Gordhan does not believe in State-Owned Enterprises, and he will never save them. He intends to dispose of them to his friends in the white monopoly capital circles in exchange for futile BEE shares. He must be stopped. To this extent, we shall approach our courts to defend the opportunistic and senseless closure or selling off of these state companies in the name of saving jobs.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

We have stated our absolute rejection to the premature, reckless and senseless ending of the lockdown. All EFF Public Representatives, Councillors, MPLs and MPs must continue to conduct oversight work of all government entities through Parliament, legislature and councils. Ever the next weeks, EFF Public Representatives are called upon to focus oversight on exposing workplaces, schools, universities, places of worship and public transport where necessary Covid-19 health precautions have not been put into place.

We have also established a Labour Desk under the leadership of National Chairperson Veronica Mente and Commissars Natasha Ntlangwini and Mpho Morolane which will be assisting workers who are being mistreated by their employers. We are aware that companies have claimed UIF monies, but not paying workers. We are aware that many workplaces are opened without compliance with health and safety standards. The labour desk will be intervening in all these cases to protect the lives and dignity of workers.

COMBINATION OF ALL ELECTIONS

During this period, the EFF will make policy and legislative submissions to Parliament which will seek to combine Local Government with the Provincial and National Elections so that South Africa transits into a common election system. The reality of separate elections is cumbersome and has often deprived public representatives of an opportunity to deliver on their promises and commitments.

If our proposal is accepted, the 2021 Local Government Elections must be postponed to 2024 and held together with the Provincial and National Elections. In our proposal, we will clearly articulate that all dysfunctional Municipalities under administration must go for elections in 2021 for a term that will finish with the rest in 2024. South Africa must have one election on 5-year intervals, instead of elections every two years.

CONTINENTAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The South African Government, which currently occupies the position of Chairperson of the African Union, must play an important role in the continental fight against COVID-19 and should coordinate the global efforts through the World Health Organisation. Winning the fight against one country in the African continent will be meaningless because we are one people and will inevitably have to interact in the future humanly.

The African continent must take the best practices from each of the countries and make these continental responses. The faster test kits methods developed in South Africa should be made available for all countries in the continent. The ventilators that are developed at cheaper and more accessible rates in Senegal should be made available to all African countries. Madagascar's remedy must be subjected to thorough scientific testing and if found to be effective, must be available for all African countries.

The EFF stands opposed to the attempts of the United States Government of sabotaging the World Health Organisation, which is the only organisation that can meaningfully coordinate a global response to a global crisis.

Petty politics and fights during this period will not assist anyone. During the cold war period, the socialist USSR and the imperialist US collaborated to develop vaccines and a common war against polio and smallpox. The present petty squabbles by the most powerful countries in the world must come to an end—the WHO must, however, not be hijacked by private business and philanthropist interests of global capitalists.

We take this opportunity once again to commend the Cuban Government for helping the world to fight the CORONA virus pandemic. The Cuban Government has sent Medical Practitioners not only to South Africa but to many countries in the Caribbean, Barbados, Jamaica, Bahamas, to Italy, Angola, Cape Verde.

The spirit of internationalism and international solidarity that defines the Cubans must define all people in the world. We salute the Cuban Doctors and their selflessness.

CONCLUSION

The right to life is the most fundamental and most important right in South Africa's Constitutional democracy and must not be sacrificed on the altar of political and economic convenience. The reality is that we all have an obligation to make sacrifices that should save lives and not make life sacrifices that will save the economy. The EFF strongly demands that the Government should reconsider the premature, senseless and reckless reopening of various sectors of the economy and schools until there is a solid scientific and epidemiological basis to do so.

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