



National
Homeless
Network

MEDIA STATEMENT
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80 experts in homelessness face the prospect of the upcoming elections with excitement and concern.

Government at national and provincial levels has a huge impact on the homeless – both negative and positive. The National Homeless Network will be calling on voters to consider the needs of the homeless when casting their votes on 29 May.

The National Homeless Network held its 7th National Conversation on Homelessness in Ekurhuleni from 19-21 February 2024. Present were up to 80 people from across the country: NGO workers, academics, researchers, pastors, government officials and people who are or have been homeless. The National Homeless Network is the chief advocate for addressing the growing problem of homelessness across our cities and towns.

The naming of the election date helped focus those present. “We are aware of how much Government, at all levels, can impact on the problem of homelessness. They can help people stop being homeless, they can make life easier when people are homeless, and they can prevent people becoming homeless – and they can do the opposite of all of those things!” said Tshwane representative, Prof Stephan de Beer. “So now is a good time to galvanise around the role of Government in responding to homelessness.”

The National Homeless Network has been working with the IEC over recent years to ensure that homeless South Africans are registered as voters. But the difficulties of working with the Department of Home Affairs to secure ID’s shows how hard it is for poor people when different parts of Government pull in opposite directions. The Network will be issuing a National Homeless Manifesto in the next few weeks with specific demands for political parties.

The annual event was being hosted in Ekurhuleni for the first time. There were visits to different organisations across the East Rand to learn from their experience of providing shelter especially for women, children and families; sourcing mobile ablution facilities; and offering a range of skills development programmes. Over two days of deliberations and discussions the focus was always to find and share useful models to enable the homeless to exit the streets sustainably. Furthermore, ways and means of measuring the impact of programmes and services were presented and discussed.

Reviewing the experiences of seven different cities over the last year showed how much the experiences varied depending on local government officials. This reinforced the need for a national policy and there was wide support for the news that the Department of Social

Development has responded to lobbying and is now committed to a Green Paper for a national policy. Core members of the National Homeless Network are helping draft this in collaboration with people across the country who are engaged on the ground. The success of Gauteng in agreeing on a provincial policy in partnership with the sector was seen as a positive sign.

The National Homeless Network urges government at all levels to lease buildings and land owned by the State to respected NGOs to establish a chain of services from drop-in day centres, overnight safe spaces, shelters, skills development centres and the crucial aspect, transitional accommodation.

“It seems that Government is more keen to spend money to evict people or to send them on short, ineffective training programmes, than to support the proven initiatives that NGO’s have been running across the country to help people turn their lives around. It is a travesty the cities remove the homeless (using force or legal routes) without actually addressing the question of where they will wash, use the toilet, find a safe space or access services that will get them back into the mainstream.” commented Ms Mary Gillett-de Klerk from the Johannesburg Homeless Network.

ENDS

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