

SOUTH AFRICAN INFORMAL TRADERS ALLIANCE

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A message from the President of South African Informal Traders Alliance (SAITA) on the effects of the Covid-19 virus to the informal business economy:

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Greetings fellow comrades. As if the bleak economic projections, rising unemployment figures, and recessionary forecasts were not enough, we are now being assaulted by a global virus so devastating in its effects and so rapid in its spread that life as we know it has changed virtually overnight, and for the foreseeable future it's going to be "business not as usual".

Government has acted decisively in promulgating emergency measures to curtail the spread of infection and we support its efforts in that regard. I call upon all our comrades and their families to heed the call of comrade president Ramaphosa and to act responsibly if we are to defeat this scourge. Everyone is at risk!

Our sector arguably will be the hardest hit. Any halt or suspension of trade would be catastrophic to the livelihoods of thousands upon thousands of informal workers and their families. Unlike the public and private sector, there is no safety net for us. We will literally be left out to dry, unless government intervenes and provides some form of assistance.

Already some city administrations have begun to curtail informal trading activities without consulting associations, once again displaying hallmark arrogance, and a total disregard and disdain for traders' representative bodies. These types of scenarios are testament to the fact that our so-called partnerships are not worth the paper they are written on.

Notwithstanding, the situation at hand requires that cool heads prevail and that all steps required for containment be implemented without delay. The risks of further infection are just too great, its ramifications, utterly dire for our economy. But we warn that implementation of counter measures to protect the informal economy from annihilation is equally important.

To that end we request immediate monetary relief to assist in compensating informal workers whose economic activities have been curtailed and/or forced to cease due to the effects of Co-vid 19. I foresee much hardship going forward if government assistance is not forthcoming. Information from our provincial structures up north suggests that local authorities differ greatly from each other in terms of social distancing on structured markets and pavements. One understands from this that there is no coordination within SALGA on processes and procedures.

SAITA through its provincial and regional structures is able to assist government in determining who of its constituents are and will be in need of a grant. The American government has, according to reliable sources, made available 1.3 trillion dollars to support

businesses and individuals affected by the Co-vid 19. We expect our government to reciprocate.

Whilst we expect government to “plead poverty”, we note with great concern that they are foolishly, and against expert advice determined to throw billions into failed and failing SOE’s. The informal business sector encompassing close to one third of the employed community in South Africa is a major contributor to the GDP and as such our contribution deserves reciprocation particularly in times of crisis, which indeed this is! I would say without hesitation that the informal economy is more worthy of a stimulus than corruption ridden parastatals.

In the meantime our constituents, disadvantaged as they may be, trudge precariously along the path of survival, barely sustaining themselves yet, retaining their dignity. Our immediate need is for government to supply free of charge, safety kits to informal workers. Most are not at the means to buy them.

I believe that the strength of a country lies not primarily in its military prowess, but in a healthy society, one that understands and embraces respect, hard work, ethics and equality. Right now we have a common enemy and we are under threat. SAITA lends its full support and weight to fight this scourge. Unity = Success,

Yours in struggle

Rosheda Muller
[President]