

Life Esidimeni Families demand action and accountability

"Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless." (Isaiah 10: 1-2)

"Allah's Apostle said, 'Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is an oppressed one.' People asked, 'O Allah's Apostle! It is all right to help him if he is oppressed, but how should we help him if he is an oppressor?' The Prophet said, 'By preventing him from oppressing others.'" (Hadith Source: Bukhari, Volume 3, Book 43, Number 624)

Johannesburg, 27 October 2016: We are here today because at least 38, and in all likelihood many more, of our cherished loved ones are dead. Thousands more are in danger.

Our beloved family members died and suffer for this reason: the Gauteng Department of Health does not think they matter and did not think it would be held responsible. But they did and do matter. They were and are our mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. They were and are human.

We cannot bring them back but we will bring them justice. We cannot change the trauma done to those still alive, but we will fight for their divine and legal right to dignified care.

This is the third time families have gathered here to call upon the Gauteng health department to protect our loved ones. Experts, doctors, psychiatrists, civil society and many others joined us in repeatedly warning the Department that its decision to shut down Life Esidimeni would place vulnerable people in danger.

The Department ignored our warnings and continues to do so. People died and continue to suffer as a result.

The Department tells the media, parliament, courts and families that all is well. It insists proper procedures were followed whilst admitting patients left Life Esidimeni without medical files. It promises that everyone is safe yet has announced the deaths of many patients and has shut down multiple NGOs once media investigations revealed their poor conditions. All evidence says our loved ones died or are in danger because of the Department's negligence. Again and again, the Department has been proven dishonest. We demand transparency, honesty and action.

We are here to stand up for those we've lost and those who survive. We have with us today families who have lost loved ones and with them remember in particular:

- Alfred Sithole
- Caswell Mosiane
- Christopher Makhoba
- Christopher Mogoerane
- Fredrick Collitz
- Hendrik Maboe
- Raisiba Mangena
- Sizwe Hlatswayo
- Sophia Molefe
- Virginia Machpelah

Each of these people was loved. Each mattered. Each died because the Department ignored us. We will not stop until we have justice for each.

The over 2000 people from Life Esidimeni who are still alive also matter. We will not stop until they are safe. They are scattered in NGOs across the province, many of them are hundreds of kilometers from their families. They survived a winter without blankets or clothes. They are hungry. They are scared. They need medication. They need care. They need the services the Department is required by law to provide them. The Department is failing them. More will die unless the Department acts now.

Today, we come together in resistance to pray for justice and while we ask God's help we know also that God's work must be our own—we therefore commit ourselves to this struggle as a community united for justice and call upon all who will stand for what is good and right to join us.

We demand:

1. The Department and MEC Qedani Mahlangu to accept responsibility for these deaths.
2. The Department to, without delay, provide a plan and make available resources for urgent measures to ensure the safety of former Life Esidimeni patients. Such a plan will require immediate action to improve conditions at NGOs and monitor the health of patients including those sent to their families.
3. The Department to comply fully with the investigations of the South African Police Service and the Health Ombud.
4. The Department to provide the following information:
 - a. The number of former Life Esidimeni patients that have died and where;
 - b. The names, locations and contact information for every facility at which former Life Esidimeni patients are now being kept; and
 - c. The procedures and criteria used to assess NGOs and results of these assessments.
5. The South African Police Service to investigate thoroughly and efficiently these deaths and refer them for prosecution or a judicial inquest.
6. The Health Ombud to be thorough and efficient in his investigation and to operate with transparency including by releasing his report without delay.
7. The Gauteng Health Department to provide a written response to this memorandum by **3 November 2016**.

Name and designation: _____

Signature: _____

Contact: _____

Family representative signatory 1: _____

Family representative signatory 2: _____

SELECT CONTACTS FOR THE LIFE ESIDIMENI FAMILY COMMITTEE:

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