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Vosloorus Residents Object to Police Violence During COVID-19 Lockdown

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Residents in the Vosloorus area, south of Boksburg (Johannesburg), have been reporting cases of police brutality since the COVID-19 national lockdown began on 26 March. The police say some of the cases are due to residents being outside their homes unlawfully. But residents have raised issues about the need to put food on the table.

The recent criticism of the repressive behaviour of the police during the lockdown comes following the shooting of a man by the Ekurhuleni Metro Police Department (EMPD). The shooting reportedly happened after the EMPD officers went on a patrol around the township to enforce lockdown regulations. Sibusiso Amos (41) was shot dead on 30 March at his home as the police ran after residents who dispersed in all directions. Four children were also injured as the EMPD and others on the patrol shot at the group of people. The injured children were taken to Thelle Mogoerane, a regional hospital covering Kathorus (Katlehong, Thokoza and Vosloorus) and nearby areas. Residents protested the brutal shooting by taking to the streets, and burning tires.

Other residents complained about the conditions of the lockdown. A man identifying himself as Jimmy said that the lockdown is “a disaster waiting to happen”. “Akasicabangeli u-government mara” (the government doesn’t care about us), he said. “At least if they allowed groups of around three so that we can continue to sell and have some traffic at the stall.” If he does not go out and sell, his family will have nothing to eat. This is the problem faced by informal workers all over the township.

In the aftermath of another police shooting that happened on Day 3 of the lockdown there were just rubber bullets cases left. The shooting happened near a local shop where the EMPD shot at people who were waiting for a turn to buy supplies. The shop owner said that the police told people to go to Pick’n’Pay while instructing him to close his shop. In separate cases, immigrant-owned shops have been forced to close while local shop owners are asked for registration papers to be able to operate.

Two men have been arrested by the Independent Police Independent Directorate (IPID) in connection with the shooting of Amos. One is a member of the EMPD and the other is a private civilian working as a security officer. The case against them has been postponed for the time being.

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