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**BLAC CALLS FOR A NATIONAL STAY-AWAY FROM SCHOOLS ON 1 JUNE 2020
UNTIL IT'S SAFE FOR OUR CHILDREN TO RETURN**

Press Statement issued by Bishop Lavis Action Community

The recent announcement by the National Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, that grade 7 and grade 12 learners must return to school, could be a death sentence to a lot of our children! Shockingly, more than 18 000 people are currently infected in South Africa with this deadly virus.

In the Western Cape more than 11 000 are infected, making it the worst hit province in the country. More alarming is the fact that many children worldwide, have recently been diagnosed with COVID-19 infections and tragically lost their lives. To date, there is no cure or vaccine for this deadly virus! This means if our children contract this fatal disease, they might face a lonely and painful death! The callous response of the provincial and national governments to force our children by law to go to school in such potentially deadly conditions, is like sending sheep to the slaughterhouse to be butchered!

Already we have seen how our frontline workers, including 3 nurses and as many cashiers in the Western Cape, have tragically died after being infected with COVID-19. Even more so, we have seen our elderly, who slaved most of their lives away, die in even larger numbers. Horrifically, it's the poor working class communities that are hardest hit by a dreaded disease that is not of their doing! Ironically, most of the blame is currently shifted to these communities for spreading this virus. What we are NOT being told is that the lockdown regulations, implemented to contain the initial spread, did not accommodate for the harsh living conditions of the poor working class!

This was always going to be a problem. And our demands to government to provide decent shelter, decent public healthcare, proper water supply, sanitation and a living wage to ease the harrowing effects of this lockdown, have mostly been ignored. Hunger, overcrowding, lack of income and abuse, have forced many to break these regulations and face the brutal might of the police and army! Only the rich could comply with these strict regulations as they have the means to do so.

It is quite clear that our country does not have the proper infrastructure to implement the very stringent measures required by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is so in practically all sectors of our society. Not only are we faced with a failing public transport system, but also a national educational system characterised by overcrowded classrooms, lack of proper water and sanitation as well as all sorts of violence. ALL of these dire problems need to be addressed to ensure the safety and security of our children at school.

This past week we have seen that schools expected to start, were not even provided with the proper PPE [personal protective equipment] or enough hand sanitisers to fight COVID-19! The Western Cape Education Department shockingly applied for the regulated social distancing not to be implemented in classrooms to accommodate for their usual overcrowding. Even more alarming is our teachers who are expected to work as specialist healthcare workers as if teaching a content heavy curriculum with the extra administrative burden is not enough! And winter is coming. We will be hit by both the common cold and influenza, resulting in nightmares for teaching and support staff.

ALL scientific experts agree that the curve should first flatten before the economy or schools need to open. Yet with infections now averaging nearly 1000 people a day, our

children must be released into the deadly environment of COVID-19. Ironically, we locked down when less than 200 people were infected! Now we want to open schools and larger sections of the economy when hundreds are dying and infections are spiking! All of these are done to satisfy the greed of the capitalist bosses to enrich themselves further through our slave labour. This they do even at the cost of us and our children dying!

BLAC refuses to adhere to the prescript of government to let our learners return to unsafe schools! This is a flagrant violation of our constitutional right to life, safety and security! As the citizens of this country and the people who elected them into these positions of privilege and power, we demand the following:

- **The fixing of all public school infrastructure to allow for the effective and safe implementation of COVID-19 health and safety regulations;**
- **The re-opening of schools at a time when NO danger of infection exists through a flattened curve and whilst ALL health and safety regulations are complied with;**
- **That government prioritises the lives of our learners above that of completing a curriculum;**
- **That the school year be re-started and/or learners be promoted from grade one up to grade 11 with an adjusted curriculum to accommodate for the year lost and the new grade;**
- **That a special curriculum be designed for grade 12's only to finish this year;**

Furthermore:

- **We call on our street committees to ensure the creation of safe and conducive learning environments for our children at home;**
- **We call on the mass roll out of free data and handsets for all our public school learners who don't have these at least for this year, in order to receive on line teaching;**
- **We call on government to also provide our teachers with such technology to assist learners from all affected public schools;**
- **We call on the effective utilisation of Zoom and other such electronic platforms to help our learners;**
- **We call on massive support for our working class parents from government to assist with their children's education;**
- **We call on the utilisation of radio and TV by government to further the education of our learners;**
- **We call on government to provide a basic income grant to all non-working citizens; to put a moratorium on all bond, rent or other mortgage payments for the next 6 months; to provide state funded food security to affected communities; to provide decent shelter to affected communities; to address the rising issue of abuse especially during this period;**

- **We call on government to utilise much-needed private funds to subsidise the above demands – as we know that the combined wealth of just 25 companies on the JSE is more than R10 trillion!**

In order to demonstrate how serious we take the lives of our children, BLAC calls on all parents to let their children:

STAY AWAY FROM SCHOOL ON 1 JUNE 2020 UNTIL OUR DEMANDS ARE MET!

BLAC DEMANDS THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT TO LET THESE POLITICIANS MEET IN A COVID CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT!

Issued by the Bishop Lavis Action Community (BLAC) on 21 May 2020.