

No one deserves to starve

A call to action Statement by African Reclaimers Organisation

African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) is a democratic organisation of Reclaimers. We represent over 3500 Reclaimers in Johannesburg and surrounding areas and are a growing organisation. Reclaimers, whose work contributes a vital part of the country's recycling economy and is an essential service, but whose rights are consistently violated and denied, are demanding that the National Command Council ends its policies that encourage xenophobia and divisions amongst the poor, and instead ensures the necessary support measures for all within South Africa.

We are calling on all who live in South Africa; citizens and non-citizens alike together with all Civil Society organisations to join us condemning Government's use of the lack of IDs, work permits or asylum status to deny large sections of our community access to food and the ability to work. We have many South Africans and non-South Africans who have been salvaging materials from waste to earn a living for decades. Not all South Africans have IDs and not all non-South Africans have work permits, asylum seeker permits or refugee status. However, COVID affects us all, regardless of the documents we have or do not have. The decision to hand out aid and grant permission to work based on these documents has no basis in health policy and has nothing to do with fighting the pandemic. It is a policy that is entirely aimed at dividing working class communities and turning neighbours against each other. It is a decision that ensures that some deserve to live and others deserve to starve and be vulnerable to infections and disease. When some members of the community contract this infection, then no one in that community is safe.

ARO has responded to this xenophobic and exclusionary policy by delivering over 4000 food parcels to Reclaimers and members of the community they live in. We have seen first-hand the effects of Government's policies on communities and how they are tearing communities apart. The Government has an obligation to ensure that everyone has access to food and sanitation. Access to food is part of the necessary conditions to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. We call upon all communities to work with us in ensuring that everyone has access to food and everything else needed to protect ourselves. We also call on Reclaimers to join communities in coordinating responses to the impending rise in infections this winter. We call all Reclaimers to join and be part of neighbourhood committees formed to deal with COVID 19 in their communities. ARO commits to sharing whatever food and resources we have with the communities in which Reclaimers live.

Join ARO in demanding the following of government:

1. Drop the requirement for IDs in order for people to get access to food.
2. Extend the R350 grant to all who need it.

3. Where people are allowed to resume their duties as determined by the stage that has been declared, they should be allowed to do so, regardless of their citizenship status and possession of ID books and passports.
4. Government must actively work with communities to set up quarantining spaces, masks, gloves and sanitation to communities.
5. For Reclaimers, provide emergency storage space for recyclables that cannot be sold immediately due to lack of demand.

We call on all organisations to endorse these demands, for the sake of all society. Millions of us lived in poverty before the pandemic and millions more have been pushed into poverty with COVID-19. None of us deserve to die of hunger and we need to organise ourselves in our communities to ensure that we survive both the pandemic and government policies.

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