



National Homeless Network

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Submission to: **Justice Dikgang Moseneke**, chairing IEC Special Review

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The National Homeless Network asks J. Moseneke and his review board to consider how to ensure that the October 2021 Municipal elections are 'free and fair' for the substantial number of homeless South African citizens who are entitled to vote.

Role of the Network

The National Homeless Network comprises organisations from most of the metropolitan municipalities across the country and also a number of smaller cities. Our mission is:

- To unite practitioners, academics, non-governmental organisations, faith-based bodies, homeless and former homeless and networks across South Africa to address homelessness in all its forms
- To be the representative body mandated to speak on behalf of the homeless sector across South Africa and to lead the sector as activists for the movement
- To advocate and lobby on behalf of the homeless at all levels – national, provincial and local
- To work with the Government to develop policies and workable sustainable strategies to address homelessness across South Africa
- To conduct and collaborate in research to explore the causes of homelessness and find sustainable solutions to this social problem

A letter sent by the National Homeless Network to President Ramaphosa in March 2020 requested that a specific response for the homeless be actioned in the event of a lockdown and this was included in his address to the nation on 23 March 2020. At our most recent national conference (Nov 2020) we had 250 participants registered who came from more than 40 organisations from 15 towns and cities.

Prior involvement with the Independent Electoral Commission

The meeting that created the National Homeless Network – in Tshwane in November 2017 – included officials from the IEC who expressed their desire to work with our members on the ground to ensure that those homeless people who are entitled to vote were not being excluded from electoral processes.

The vast majority of homeless people are South African citizens (for example, an HSRC census of the homeless in central Durban in 2016 established that only 10% of the homeless there were foreign nationals, and this pattern is likely to be repeated across the country). Most are therefore entitled to register to vote in South African elections.

But our experience is that the majority are not currently registered; moreover, many are not even aware that they are entitled to register because of the assumed need for an address. The IEC has established that they can enable homeless people to register through a legitimate interpretation of the address requirement.

Working with some members of the National Homeless Network in the run-up to the 2019 National and Provincial elections, the IEC succeeded in registering, for the first time, homeless many South African citizens who had never previously voted (as well as some whose voter registration had lapsed or was in another place). For example, in central Durban working with the Denis Hurley Centre, the IEC registered over 400 homeless individuals in 2019.

One of the obstacles to registration is the fact that many homeless people (we estimate up to 50%) do not have an ID card. Our members are therefore separately working with the Department of Home Affairs in some of our cities to facilitate the provision of IDs or replacement IDs for those who lack them so they can register to vote.

Request to the Review

We request the IEC to take the following steps to ensure that for 2021 'free and fair' also extends to the thousands of our fellow South African citizens who are homeless.

- That the IEC work closely with homeless NGOs in each city to raise awareness among the qualifying homeless of their right to vote
- That IEC stations (both for registration and for voting) be provided in locations that are accessible to the homeless (because of where they are located and how welcoming they are)
- That in cities where there are known gathering places of homeless people, the IEC use mobile registration facilities to visit these locations to create voter awareness and to provide easy access for registering
- That there are clear instructions to IEC officials in each city on how homeless people can register to vote in the absence of a street address (by, for example, the use of city maps where they can indicate their regular sleeping place)
- That the IEC stress to Municipal officials and SAPS that it is illegal for police, metro law enforcement and private security confiscating or destroying IDs and they should desist immediately
- That the IEC request from the Department of Home Affairs in preparation for the elections the free replacement of IDs for homeless people who have lost them as a result of police/ security interventions

Commitment to Collaboration

As a National Network – and through our members on the ground in most cities across South Africa – we declare our willingness to work with IEC officials to ensure that the commitment to free and fair elections in 2021 include also the homeless men and women of South Africa.

National Homeless Network

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