

COMPATRIOTS OF SOUTH AFRICA

Email: cheslin.felix72@gmail.com

13 Goss Crescent, Extension 22, Bethelsdorp, 6059

<https://www.facebook.com/CompatriotsSA>

Cheslin Felix: 083 718 7824 / Sias Smith: 079 261 7133



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Dear Justice Dikgang Moseneke

Our Response to the Inquiry into Ensuring Free and Fair Local Government Elections During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our opinion on the inquiry on whether the 2021 local government elections are free and fair during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is our view that the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdown regulations are not conducive to the holding of free and fair local governmental elections during October 2021.

The current constraints do not allow us to do proper campaigning within the communities to promote our political party and canvass votes. As a result, the smaller parties, like Compatriots of South Africa, are severely handicapped because we are not as well-known as the bigger parties who do not have to put as much effort to market the organisation and what they stand for. The smaller political parties also do not get as much media coverage like the larger parties who can afford to pay advertisers and broadcasters to advertise their organisations. We heavily depend on the ability to reach our communities through campaigning projects which include door-to-door canvassing, political gatherings, conferences, workshops, rallies, and motorcades to name a few. However, due to the constraints put on the number of people allowed to attend these types of events both indoors and outdoors, the numbers we are seeing now is much lower than our pre-lockdown political activities.

Aside from the constraints put on political activities by the government, people are also afraid to attend events where a lot of people will be gathering because they fear they might contract the COVID-19 virus which has proven to be deadly. The fear of attending large gatherings have severely hampered our ability to communicate and reach our community members, especially those who are not on social media sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. Our fear is that many people will opt not to vote or register to vote because of the long queues they will need to stand in which exposes them to potentially contract the virus.

Currently we are facing the third wave of the Corona Virus Pandemic and it does not look like the virus will go away anytime soon. We may even face a few more waves of virus outbreaks which will peak the infection rates and furthermore inhibit our political campaign practices. Political party agents and independent electoral monitoring bodies who are responsible to assist members of the public during the registration and election processes will also be at greater risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus as they will encounter hundreds, if not thousands, of people during the election process. The result will be that a lot of the party representatives will have to withdraw from such practices since some of them might have comorbidities which increases their risk of infection.

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In trying to make the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions more conducive to holding free and fair elections, we appeal to the IEC to consider the following:

1. Increase the number of voting stations available in each ward to minimise queueing.
2. Prioritise vaccination of the political party agents and independent electoral monitoring bodies to minimise their risk of contracting the virus while helping others on registration and voting days.
3. Supply the voting stations with medical grade personal protective equipment (PPE) for the political party agents and independent electoral monitoring bodies.
4. Broaden the scope of special votes to allow the elderly and those at higher risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus to vote from the comfort of their own homes thereby avoiding unnecessary exposure to infection.
5. Have a two-day election period instead of having the elections on one day forcing people to congregate in large numbers.

We would like to voice our opinion during oral submissions as well to once again explain why we say that the COVID-19 pandemic is not conducive to the holding of free and fair local governmental elections in October 2021. Thank you for taking the time to consider our opinion and suggestions. All the best with the investigation.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Cheslin Felix

President of Compatriots of South Africa

Cell: +27 83 718 7824

Email: cheslin.felix72@gmail.com

