



JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT: Ngwathe Local Municipality is incapable of providing water services

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The Inyanda National Land Movement and the Parys Water Crisis Coordinating Committee supports the Tumahole community in Parys for boldly confronting the Ngwathe Local Municipality about the ongoing water crisis. This week alone, temperatures in the area have averaged 30 degrees. The municipality's failure to provide a basic, yet essential, service such as water means that people will face the challenges of daily life in the summer heat with no water.

"The Ngwathe Local Municipality, the Fezile Dabi District Municipality and the Department of Water and Sanitation have been well aware of the lack of supply and poor quality of water in Parys for many years," says Moipone Jwayi the National Chair of the Inyanda National Land Movement. The water crisis became especially evident in Tumahole with the Covid pandemic since washing hands is one of the key Covid preventative measures. While there were and still are some Jojo tanks available in the area, these tanks are not regularly supplied with water and it can take up to four weeks for it to be replenished by the municipality.

National Treasury's austerity plans, which includes deep budget cuts for basic services, has left many municipalities without the resources to repair key infrastructure. "Austerity measures coupled with the lack of good governance, corruption, and deployment of persons without the required expertise to perform critical duties has

plummeted municipalities into distress. Government is unable to satisfactorily meet the water demands of the poor working-class communities in rural and urban areas,” says Aaron Ranayeke from the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE).

“The Assembly of the Unemployed is very worried about the water crisis given the heatwave in the Free State. We are particularly concerned about the Tumahole people who are getting mud from their taps instead of water. Government isn’t worried about what is happening there and people are being arrested instead of government solving the real problem,” says Khokhoma Motsi from the Assembly of the Unemployed.

When the Inyanda National Land Movement and TCOE met with members of the Tumahole community in 2022, the community explained that the water crisis has been unfolding since 2009. Residents of Mandela, which forms part of Tumahole, say that while there are Jojo tanks and a borehole (Sedibeng), this supply of water is unreliable and insufficient. The community felt aggrieved that the water needs of commercial agriculture and the mines were made a priority above those of the community.

“Tumahole residents felt strongly that the Ngwathe Local Municipality is not only corrupt, but also lacks the capacity and expertise to provide water services,” adds Ranayeke.

In November 2022, the Parys Water Crisis Coordinating Committee presented a set of urgent demands to the Ngwathe Local Municipality regarding the water crisis. The Ngwathe Local Municipality did nothing about these demands, so it comes as no surprise that this crisis has escalated in the way that it has. In a community meeting during January 2023, the decision was then taken to protest and

shutdown Tumahole in an attempt to draw attention to the extent of the water crisis and how severely it has impacted people's quality of life.

The Inyanda National Movement therefore stands in solidarity with the community for exercising their constitutional right to protest since the lack of water in Parys is a violation of the resident's constitutional right to water. However, as a nonviolent movement we are opposed to violence which destroys infrastructure and is a threat to life. "Given how essential water is to life and health, the State's failure to deliver on its constitutional mandate to supply clean drinking water is a form of violence against the community. We also condemn the use of violence by the police in response to the protests of the frustrated community. The community is now subjected to an illegal 'lockdown' with limited electricity, network coverage and still has no access to water. This is an inhumane, and arguably, unconstitutional response by the State to the understandable rage of citizens whose pleas and demands for a regular supply of clean water have gone unheard for too long," adds Jwayi. It is clear that the Ngwathe Local Municipality is not fit for purpose and is unable to provide basic service delivery such as supplying water.

The Local Government Municipal Structures Act of 1998, clarifies the role and responsibilities of district municipalities when a local municipality is unable to perform its constitutional functions. "The Fezile Dabi District Municipality, failed to intervene once it became evident that the Ngwathe Local Municipality was unable to resolve the water crisis. The Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act of 2005 deals with matters such as cooperative governance and Integrated Governance Relations for the implementation of protocols to facilitate integrated service delivery. If these two acts had been fully implemented this water crisis may have been averted.

Therefore, both the Ministers of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs as well as the Department of Water and Sanitation equally failed the people of Tumahole,” explains Ranayeke.

The Inyanda National Land Movement and the Parys Water Crisis Coordinating Committee therefore demands that:

1. The Ngwathe Local Municipality acknowledges that they are incapable of providing water services.

2. The Fezile Dabi District Municipality performs its obligations as per the Municipal Structures Act of 1998 and takes over the water services which the Ngwathe Local Municipality is unable to provide.

3. The immediate release of those arrested for exercising their constitutional right to express their frustrations and health concerns about having no access to water.

The Inyanda National Land Movement, Botshabelo Unemployed Movement and the Assembly of the Unemployed pledges solidarity with the Parys Water Crisis Coordinating Committee. Our movements will mobilize our constituencies to provide support for the struggles of the people in Parys until the water crisis is satisfactorily resolved and these demands have been met. Our communities are facing crises on multiple fronts, and it is important that as rural based movements we stay united through our common struggles.

While the water crisis in Parys remains critical, it is not an isolated case. The 2022 Blue Drop report illustrated the alarming decline in tap water quality and management processes. In 2022, about 23% of municipalities were unable to provide quality tap water services to residents. The 2022 Green Drop report revealed that a number of wastewater works scored below 31%. The report concluded that this

will be detrimental to the environment and the health of the residents. Given that the Blue and Green drop reports was disbanded in 2013 and only reinstated in 2022, many municipalities have been able to hide the extent of the water and sanitation crisis for many years. Despite the Minister of Water and Sanitation's 2022 commitment to engage the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs regarding drastic intervention measures to improve water services, the situation has worsened. Government must act with a greater sense of urgency before this crisis becomes a national catastrophe.

ISSUED BY THE INYANDA NATIONAL LAND MOVEMENT, THE BOTSHABELO UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT AND THE ASSEMBLY OF THE UNEMPLOYED.

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