

16 January 2016.

Dear neighbours and friends of Masiphumele,

There are many broken communities throughout South Africa, but right now the people of Masiphumele are bleeding. We must be under no illusion what severe overcrowding, unemployed youth, unsympathetic local authority and, broader discrimination and paternalism, is doing to this community. Without any doubt, their already palpable anger will, in time boil over. The hope of a process from township to just another suburb is very distant indeed.

For as long as people migrate in search of work, despite all the odds, Masi offers better job prospects than many places elsewhere.

Right now, our failing economy is driving many youth to dabble in drugs, peddling them and using them. With 40% of the valley population living in Masi, the problem affects the people in this choked community acutely.

The ineffective police response to drug trading has lead to protests since the end of last year. The protests lead to the killing of some alleged drug dealers. One person has since been charged with murder. In a series of midnight raids, others have been arrested and charged, the majority with 'Public Violence'.

The rule of law is a firm anchor of our democracy. Those charged are presumed innocent until found guilty. This includes their right to a defence. There is no place for any other 'justice'! Masi leaders are all agreed that justice must take its course and time will tell if the right person was charged with murder. Their efforts to calm and guide a disaffected community is deserving of highest praise. (I base this statement not on hearsay but on having made it my business to be present at meetings throughout, and assessing the gravity of the situation first-hand).

The Masi fire late last year caused around 4,500 people to lose all their possessions, the two demolitions of re-erected shacks, those who now live in a hall and others who sleep rough in the bush and the absence of land or decent services, have left a community to feel deep injustice. The perception is that they are getting a raw deal.

Although demonstrators are now entangled in costly court proceedings, the source of the problem, drugs and drug dealing goes on unabated. We must not fail to grasp just how aggrieved the people in Masi feel.

In an effort to re-build confidence in this besieged community, leaders have called several meetings to convey the need for due process as far as the law is concerned. At one such meeting, the Masiphumele Development Community Forum was elected by popular vote. Their immediate task is to raise funds for the defence of the accused. Beyond that, their mandate is to respond to situations such as the periodic fires, and if funds permit to support local development projects.

Lucia Mayo is the Chairperson and heads the six-member committee of the MDCF. They immediately set to work by going on a door-to-door campaign asking each household in Masi to donate R50. They have currently raised close to R6,000.

Their target, as things stand, is to raise R39,000[1]. That would cover tangible immediate costs. Masi leaders are agreed that raising money for possible long trials is not sustainable but in the short term, a committed lawyer is needed. His mandate, besides obligatory court appearances etc. is to have the charges of Public Violence quashed. There are sound reasons why this should be pursued.

I have met with the community leaders, Mabana and Moletsane. I have also met with the legal representative, Mr Ntsimango and I have met with the MDCF committee on several occasions since 3 January. Despite Mr Ntsimango having halved his fees, the cost of representation is beyond the reach of the door-to-door campaign.

This letter is to seek your support. It is right and appropriate that the wider valley community also contribute to the fund-raising effort of the MDCF. This may not be everyone's way of showing support, and I respect that. Others, before my asking, have already offered to make modest contributions to this fund. Thank you indeed!

I'd be grateful if you would donate to the account:

Account name: Masiphumelele Development Community Forum.

Bank: First National Bank.

Branch: Longbeach Mall, Branch code: 250 655

Account number: 62579985171.

Committee member to be informed is Lucia Mayo
(luchrisiamayoni@gmail.com)

If you wish to discuss any of the above with me, feel free to do so. I'll do the best I can to clarify.

Yours sincerely,

Horst Kleinschmidt.