
MEDIA STATEMENT

Monday, 19 September 2022

SALGA President Bheke Stofile is concerned about the accumulating death toll of municipal councillors and officials

The President of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), Cllr Bheke Stofile, is gravely concerned by the increasing number of incidents of intimidation and killings of councillors and municipal officials as widely reported in the media in recent weeks.

“It cannot be that week after week we convey condolences for public representatives who have been killed. The killing of municipal councillors and/or senior managers should be viewed within the contestation of power, it presents a direct attack on our hard-won democracy,” says Cllr Stofile.

SALGA had in the previous years suggested that the rate of successful prosecution of councillor killings must be raised by turning councillor slayings into priority crimes.

The SALGA Governance, Intergovernmental and International Relations Working Group has observed that there is an increasing number of attacks and killings of councillors and municipal officials, and damage to municipal property during service delivery protests.

While the nature of attacks varies, and others manage to get the media attention while others do not get reported; the following is common:

- Security threats at offices and homes;
- Councillor’s family held up in their homes;
- Extortion of money from Councillors;
- Intimidation from gangsters related to building projects;
- Threats for executing official responsibilities;
- Killing of both councillors and officials;
- Damage to moveable and immovable property.



Cllr Stofile says: "These attacks threaten the credibility of our democracy; poses a danger where society, in general, might develop intolerance which is inimical to our democracy; erodes our constitutional imperatives in so far as it does not reflect neither the character of our society or the will of the people, and it negatively impacts the credibility of local government as a potential area of opportunity for qualified and competent public representative and prospective employees".

Amongst the proposed solutions, SALGA believes there is a need for platforms to engage on issues relating to councillors' welfare and support to ensure that communities are educated on the roles and responsibilities of the different spheres of government through public awareness campaigns and roadshows. The South African Police Service (SAPS) and National Prosecuting Authority of South Africa (NPA) should ensure that reported cases are investigated and prosecuted, and a model of conducting risk assessments for councillors and municipal officials should be developed as a matter of priority

"The killing of councillors and municipal officials is not a local government matter that can simply be resolved single-handedly, there is a need to marshal society in its entirety to go back to the basics - where there will be respect for human life and democracy. The killing of councillors takes place at the backdrop of a violent society where human life is no longer valued," Cllr Stofile concludes.

In 2019, SALGA commissioned a study to investigate the 'Harm and Killings' of councillors and municipal officials through the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), and the outcomes of the study were made available in a report entitled: "Violence in Democracy: A Study on Damage to Property, Intimidation, Threats, Harm, and Killing of Councillors and Municipal Officials".

The killing of municipal leaders and officials, including the destruction of their property harms the functionality and stability of municipalities. Therefore, an attack on local government representatives is a serious threat to democracy.

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