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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**NATIONAL EDUCATION CRISIS FORUM CONCLUDES MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

*JOHANNESBURG*: The National Education Crisis Forum hosted a multi-stakeholder engagement from 10-11 December 2016, with representative of various student structures and formations from different South African universities; as well as University Council representatives, Vice-Chancellors, the Higher Education Parents Dialogue (HEParD) and labour.

Convened by former Deputy Chief Justice, Dikgang Moseneke and nine (9) Co-Convenors;

Ms Santie Botha, Mr Sello Hatang, Mr Jabu Mabuza, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Ms Mary Metcalfe, Judge Yvonne Mokgoro, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, Mr Jay Naidoo and Professor Pitika Ntuli, the Forum hosted the stakeholder engagement for the purpose of engaging stakeholders on the resolution of long and short term education challenges as well as the creation of an environment for the peaceful continuation of education in 2017.

“The Forum sought to bring everyone together around one table, and mediate a communication process that would allow the different stakeholders to find common ground that can move the conversation forward,” said retired Deputy Chief Justice, Judge Dikgang Moseneke. “Thus far, the voices of our stakeholders have been heard in isolation. What we have accomplished in bringing the stakeholders together is a meeting of minds in an honest and respectful environment to dissect and unpack what we all agree is a national crisis,” said Moseneke.

The Forum invited different institutions to share the vast work they have already undertaken towards finding solutions to the call for a reimagined education system. “Statistician Risenga Maluleke painted a broad picture of the education legacy of South Africa, which clearly demonstrated that the matter that the students have raised is not a new challenge,” said Moseneke. Stakeholders found agreement on the need for the restructuring of the education system. Further presentations were made around identifying sustainable funding models to free education, which focused the stakeholders’ collective thinking around what potential models of funding needs to look like, and what the sources of the funding could be.

Critical to the stakeholder process was the identification of four immediate actions which would need to be undertaken within the remaining weeks of 2016, that include the release of students from prison (including issues of bail) and attending to the matter of criminal charges against students; the review of historic debt that would disallow any students from registering for the new academic year; addressing the proposed 8% fee-increase for 2017; and internal disciplinary processes within each university.

“The Forum has given the students and VCs a commitment to address these four issues, as they have been collectively agreed upon,” said the Judge. “We have already commenced various levels of negotiations through the Higher Education Parents Dialogue (HEParD) and The South African Council of Churches (SACC), who have reaffirmed their commitment to this particular challenge,” he said.

Student activists were unwavering in their call for the release of detained and criminally charged students, referencing KZN-based student Bonginkosi Gift Khanyile - a student at Durban University of Technology (DUT). “We are all in agreement that no student should spend Christmas 2016 in jail and Bonginkosi is the most visible example of this situation, although there are other students in the same situation,” said Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, General Secretary of the SACC. “As the church and parents – we have intensified our mobilisation in KZN to support this effort, and make a commitment that in each case around the country, we will do the same” said Bishop Mpumlwana. The Forum emphasized that while all efforts would be exhausted in addressing these matters urgently, the final decisions on criminal matters rest primarily with the State.

The dialogue throughout the weekend reflected a consensus that the issue of fee increases is a structural problem related to how universities are financed reiterating the need for state involvement in this discussion. “Unless there is a policy decision to change the current model of funding – the conversation on free education is futile,” said Mpumlwana. The Forum is clear that dialogue around historic debt and registration fees - which are separate issues from the 8% increase - should be pursued with government, and the convenors will be seeking an urgent engagement in this regard.

“We are driving towards a comprehensive convention on education (similar to the CODESA model) that will be optimal in changing the status quo through the development of a holistic national education policy,” said Bishop Mpumlwana.

The Forum and the various stakeholders agreed to reconvene in a broader convention in January/February 2017, to continue to address the numerous matters related to the education crisis. In the meantime, teams will be working on various work-streams identified by the meeting in preparation for the convention.

**ENDS**

***About the National Education Crisis Forum***

*The National Education Crisis Forum is an initiative convened by 10 leaders with a range of backgrounds including civil society, business, education, religion, law, education and culture. The Convenors of the Forum include Ms Santie Botha, Mr Sello Hatang, Mr Jabu Mabuza, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Ms Mary Metcalfe, Judge Yvonne Mokgoro; Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, Mr Jay Naidoo and Professor Pitika Ntuli*.

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