

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**South African Council of Churches Approaches Minister Sisulu on University Student Accommodation Crisis**

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) has written to the Minister of Human Settlements, Lindiwe Sisulu to seek a meeting to discuss the prospect of government intervention in support of universities for student housing for a long term solution to the crisis. The SACC believes that Government has a responsibility to find solutions, and will also, in addition to Minister Sisulu, be approaching the Minister of Higher Education and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), to explore possible partnerships between the national government and university town municipalities, and to perhaps involve the provincial governments for a comprehensive solution and adequate student housing.

The SACC is greatly concerned with the current student accommodation crisis which has plagued institutions of higher learning around the country. With bed shortages at South African universities estimated at 216 000, this is a grave concern for the health, sanitation and safety of hundreds of thousands of students. The struggle for accommodation, recently highlighted in the TV program featuring the Tshwane University of Technology and Wits, in addition to the struggle that is associated with general student funding, casts a shadow of uncertainty over young people's choices to further their education.

Speaking for the SACC, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana gave an example of students assisted by churches, from northern Zululand, who got admitted to the University of Johannesburg and had to seek accommodations on their own in the university neighbourhood. "The insecurities related to this and how this detracts from their academic focus leads to much frustration and distress"

Many students are driven, in desperation, to extreme measures such as sleeping in the libraries or university ablution blocks. Students become vulnerable to exploitation, substance abuse and sexual abuse, dealing with the pressures of this situation; and this cannot be allowed to continue without resolution.

The SACC believes that ultimately, student housing should be part of the concept of a University Town, where each university neighbourhood has appropriate accommodations for students and lecturers, facilities for families, including pre-school, primary and high school education access for the families of workers and teaching staff, as well the necessary life amenities. This approach would considerably improve the quality of life and the teaching and learning experience for universities like the University of Venda, and Fort Hare where some teaching staff live as far away as East London - some 120 km away from campus!

The churches, as the pillars of each community, need to make every effort to find helpful solutions that will give families the peace of mind that their student children are able to focus on their studies in a secure and agreeable environment.

**ENDS.**