



International Network for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights  
Red Internacional para los Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales  
Réseau international pour les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels  
الشبكة العالمية للحقوق الاقتصادية والاجتماعية و الثقافية

For immediate release

## **International organizations call on South Africa to protect leaders of shack-dwellers from attacks**

*New York, 8 December 2014.* The International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) sent a letter on December 5, 2014 to the President of the Republic of South Africa to express serious concern regarding a recent wave of alleged assassinations, threats, arbitrary detentions and other acts of violence and intimidation against leaders of Abahlali baseMjondolo.

Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali) is a movement of shack dwellers of South Africa which campaigns to improve the living conditions of low income people living in informal settlements on the outskirts of South Africa's major cities, in particular in relation to the right to adequate housing, access to essential services, and protection from forced evictions

Reportedly, on 29 September 2014, Thuli Ndlovu, leader of Abahlali, was shot to death in her home in KwaZulu-Natal province, following her involvement in investigations regarding allegations of corruption and illegal conduct by the Councilor of Ward 12, relating to the distribution of public housing units.

Ms. Ndlovu's murder was the most recent in a series of violent acts perpetrated this past year against shack dweller leaders who have been struggling to defend the human rights of residents of South Africa's informal settlements. Last year, three other community leaders (Mr. Gwala, Mr. Qumbela and Ms. Nzuza) affiliated with were murdered after organizing to resist forcible evictions in the Cato Crest settlement, also in KwaZulu-Natal.

More housing activists have allegedly been shot and wounded by eThekweni Municipal Land Invasion Unit, the law enforcement unit tasked with carrying out evictions and demolitions in settlements that have been deemed illegal. Several Abahlali leaders have also reported receiving numerous death threats via telephone calls and SMS messages, as well as in-person during conversations with municipal authorities.

The letter, endorsed by more than 220 organizations and 50 individuals in 70 countries, raises particular concern that the killings of Ms. Ndlovu, Mr. Gwala, Mr. Qumbela and Ms. Nzuza, as well as the other instances of violence, threat, intimidation, and unlawful or arbitrary arrests and detention, come in reprisal for the activities of Abahlali baseMjondolo to defend and promote the human rights of residents of South Africa's informal settlements

ESCR-Net called on the Government of South Africa to immediately cease all threats, acts of intimidation, violence, and unlawful or arbitrary arrests against shack dwellers and their organizational leaders in South Africa and to provide effective protection for leaders of Abahlali baseMjondolo against any unlawful acts and human rights violations;

ESCR-Net also calls to launch effective, independent, prompt and impartial investigations into all alleged crimes that have been perpetrated against shack dweller leaders, particularly the murder of Ms. Ndlovu, and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice and that victims are provided with effective remedies.

Finally, the letter asks the Government of South Africa to undertake all necessary steps to eliminate corruption in the allocation of public housing, forced evictions and unlawful demolitions affecting residents in informal settlements and shantytowns and to ensure that the human rights, including adequate housing and dignity, of South Africa's shack dwellers are guaranteed and protected.

The complete letter is available at <http://www.escr-net.org/node/365715>

### **About ESCR-Net**

The International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) connects more than 270 NGOs, social movements and activists from 70 countries around the world, offering a strategic exchange and collective advocacy to build a global movement to make human rights and social justice a reality for all.

### **For more information**

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