MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: PSA calls for resignation of the Eastern Cape MEC of Education**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) representing thousands of educators and administrative staff at schools across the country, is shocked by the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, by the Eastern Cape Department of Education. It must be noted that schools were re-opened despite warnings raised by the PSA, that the province was not ready, noting the well-known challenges affecting schools in the province, which were exacerbated by the pandemic. However, the department repeatedly assured people of their readiness. The PSA is not surprised that more than ten schools close daily, owing to either learners or staff members confirming positive cases within the OR Tambo district areas including Qumbu Village; Mt Frere; Tsolo and others. Schools in the province will be closed automatically, owing to the accelerated rate of infections, which causes a huge influx to the already struggling Department of Health which could lead to the paralysis of the provincial health system.

The PSA was recently alerted to the news of almost 200 learners, from Makaula Senior Secondary School in Mt. Frere, testing positive for the virus. It was further reported that Willowvale High School, has one toilet for employees, forcing learners to relieve themselves in the bush or behind classrooms. Other schools, including Xakani Senior Primary in Tabankulu and Buhlambo Primary in Mt. Ayliff, are operating without Personal Protective Equipment (PPE's) and no water, with high infection rates forcing the schools to close. Almost all schools in Qumbu are closed due to the number of confirmed cases for both learners and staff members.

Other reports confirm that tanks were delivered with no water and toilets were not properly erected. The PSA made a submission to the department, demanding the provision of scholar transport, PPE, toilets, water, and sanitizers before re-opening schools to avoid exposing learners and employees to risks. Unfortunately, this has fallen on deaf ears where most schools are still operating without PPE. All these matters could have been avoided, considering that they are happening right under the MEC's watch, who has not acceded to the call. This cannot be accepted in these trying times where social ills are rife and rate of infections accelerate daily. This negligence has reversed the gain of lockdown in endeavor to flatten the curve. The PSA cannot watch on, hence the call on the MEC to resign following the failure to ensure implementation of safety measures in compliance with Safety Regulations. Sadly, he hopelessly failed to monitor compliance and intervene in these reported cases. Since the MEC slept on duty, the PSA escalated the matter to the Premier for intervention.

The province cannot wait for other leaners to be infected and even succumb to COVID-19 before action is taken. If the MEC does not resign, the Premier must fire him as the people of Eastern Cape deserve better. The PSA once again appeals to the Minister of Education to reconsider her decision and honor the call by the PSA to close school to avoid more infection and death in the province.

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