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2001**FORUM FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

SOWETO PRIDE: COERCED POSTPONEMENT BY THE STATE

It is with great regret that we, the Forum for the Empowerment of Women, announce the postponement of Soweto Pride 2016. The postponement is a result of being bullied by state entities who seem intent on stemming out and discouraging all forms of political protest.

Every year as we plan for SOWETO Pride, we consistently attempt to comply with all regulations that aim to be about health and safety in organising events at great costs to the organisation. One of these is a requirement to apply for risk categorisation ranging from low, medium to high risk.

For the past 11 years Soweto Pride has been categorised as low risk. This year we were informed that, due to “unruly behaviour” at Soweto Pride 2015, we have been moved to medium risk. This decision was received from provincial office of the South African Police Services backed by Emergency Medical Services, Disaster Management, Johannesburg Metro Police and Public Order Police.

The effect of the change in risk categorisation has grave consequences. In addition to the preparations and resources that have been placed into Soweto Pride 2016, the above state entities require the following conditions to be met:

An additional 22 JMPD officers which will cost the organisation about **R35 000.00**. We have been informed that we, a non-governmental entity that is small and under-resourced need to pay for JMPD because it is a public holiday.

An additional 300 marshals that will be present at the march as well as the after-march event. This cost is estimated to be **R75 000.00**.

An additional 80 graded security guards, estimated to cost the organisation about **R36 000.00**.

In essence for SOWETO Pride to continue on the 24th September, the organisation would have to pay an additional **R110 000.00** or face the risk of being shut down on the day of the event.

BOARD MEMBERS: Kwezilomso Mbandazayo (Chairperson); Mmathabo Maqhubela (Treasurer); Sebenzile Nkambule (Secretary); Mandisa Mbatha; Charmaine Dlamini

Registration Number: 030-374-NPO

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We have been unequivocally informed that should we not comply with these conditions by Saturday, Soweto Pride 2016 will be shut down.

The legislation governing recreational events clearly states that in the event of a change in risk categorisation written reasons are to be furnished to the event organiser. We have not received any written reasons. We inquired as to the reasons behind this decision and have received no concrete response save for the “unruly behaviour”. The SAPS maintains that there was chaos at Soweto Pride 2015 that saw a number of physical altercations, though we were not provided with reported cases substantiating these alleged incidents.

Aside from the above additional resources, there were a number of restrictions that have been imposed on the event. We have been informed that, amongst others,

We have to look into charging an entrance fee as a means of crowd control. We have informed the relevant stakeholders that this goes against our mission and vision to create an accessible safe social space for LGBTI persons of all backgrounds.

FEW as an organisation, is required to obtain a liquor licence and sell alcohol at the venue. We have confirmed that our objectives as an organisation do not allow us to do so.

No cooler boxes will be allowed at the venue as their belief is that limiting the intake of alcohol will minimise the risk of chaos.

We were advised that should we want Soweto Pride 2016 to continue, we will have to consider hosting a march without the social space at the park. We informed the relevant stakeholders that we have the event to create a space where LGBTI persons can feel safe and secure to socialize and be themselves without fear of any intimidation or violence.

We have attempted to negotiate with the relevant stakeholders. However we were advised that their power is absolute and cannot be challenged. During the meetings held with relevant stakeholders were informed that we “cannot be trusted” and that they “cannot tell whether you are male or female.”

This postponement goes beyond financial implications. Throughout the years of organising Soweto Pride we have been subjected to degradation and homophobia by a number of state entities, and often subjected to unreasonable conditions and restrictions.

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Today we say enough! We will not host Soweto Pride on their terms. We will not be strong-armed into changing the very essence of our Soweto Pride to fit their desires. FEW will be taking the matter further with the relevant authorities. We will not meekly accept the closing down of communal spaces to LGBTI persons. We ask all who support our rights guaranteed in the Constitution (amongst them the rights to safety, freedom of association, and freedom of movement) to join us in our fight to eradicate discrimination in our own communities by the very entities tasked with protecting and assisting us. Safety, Justice and Freedom are Our Rights!

WE WILL HOST SOWETO PRIDE AND IT WILL BE FREE AND ACCESSABLE TO ALL!

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