SERI CONDEMNS THE CRACK DOWN ON INFORMAL TRADERS IN INNER CITY JOHANNESBURG

SERI notes with concern the sustained crack-down on informal traders that has taken place since 10 October under the auspices of a “clean up” initiative of the Mayor of the City of Johannesburg. Since this date, the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD), in conjunction with officials from the South African Revenue Services (SARS), have conducted raids in the inner city. During these operations, officials forced thousands of informal traders to vacate their trading posts and prevented them from trading by threatening them, demolishing their stalls, confiscating and impounding goods (without following legally prescribed procedures such as setting up inventories of goods confiscated) and physically assaulting informal traders (including reports of informal traders being beaten with sticks and whipped).

The operation underway is in no way a “clean up” of the inner city and does not comply with the City of Johannesburg’s existing economic, spatial or urban management policies or by-laws. The City has regularly indicated that it recognises informal trade as a key economic activity which creates livelihood opportunities.

In practice, however, the City has threatened the essential livelihood opportunities and dignity of informal traders by these operations. These actions should be viewed as part of a comprehensive campaign on the part of the City aimed at driving the inner city poor from Johannesburg and should be condemned in the strongest terms.

Stuart Wilson, SERI’s Executive Director said: “The City’s lawless and vicious conduct is nothing less than a war on the poor. There is nothing World Class about a City that treats its most vulnerable citizens in this way.”

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