



29 September 2009

Statement by the Children of South Africa (CHOSA) on the attacks in Kennedy Road and the forced closure and ransacking of the Claire Estate Drop-In Centre (CEDIC)

The Children of South Africa (CHOSA), an international non-governmental organisation based in the United States and South Africa, would like to express its deep concern regarding the situation in Kennedy Road.

CHOSA's mission is to identify and support community based organizations (CBOs) that reach out and take care of orphans and other vulnerable children in South Africa.

One of the organisations we are currently working with and supporting is the Claire Estate Drop-In Centre (CEDIC) whose offices are in the Kennedy Road informal settlement in Durban, South Africa. As a community-based organisation, the Drop-In Centre is the only organisation in the area providing much needed and essential services to orphaned and other vulnerable children.

However, since Saturday 26 September 2009, the CEDIC has been forced to close after a mob of about 40 people from a nearby settlement attacked a local youth committee meeting. Firsthand accounts from the community indicate that the offices were ransacked on Monday 28 September by the mob which wielded guns, knives and spears. A number of community members have indicated that their homes have also been demolished by the mob and that some of their family members are still missing or arrested and that at least four residents have been found dead.

Just as worrying to us is the assertion from residents that the mob was supported and coordinated by the local branch of the African National Congress and are aimed at members of the Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) movement with much of the violence being perpetrated in full view of members of the Sydenham SAPS who have done nothing to stop it. These allegations are backed up by statements we have read from social workers, professors, church organisations and NGOs associated on different levels with members of the community.

The attacks on Kennedy Road are a significant violation of people rights including the rights of the children in the settlement. We are profoundly concerned with the lives of the children of Kennedy Road and we request that they be given a platform to voice their concerns. Since Saturday, over 100 children who are fed by the CEDIC have been going hungry and hundreds have not attended school. The significant number of child-headed households that the CEDIC assists have been left without much needed support.

The Children of South Africa therefore calls for an immediate secession of violence in the community, the re-opening of the Clare Estate Drop-in Centre and the safe return of all staff members. We call for Kennedy Road and the CEDIC to be run by the residents themselves where the community's voice will be heard and where decisions are made democratically. We also call for an immediate transparent and independent investigation into the causes of the violence including the involvement of local political parties and the failure of the Sydenham Police to prevent the attacks in the settlement. Finally, CHOSA demands that all those involved in perpetrating attacks be arrested and prosecuted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "jsacks". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Jared Sacks

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