

Press Release

For immediate release

6 March 2020



South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

Media contact: Hermann Pretorius, IRR Campaigns Manager – 079 875 4290; hermann@irr.org.za

Media enquiries: Michael Morris Tel: 066 302 1968 Email: michael@irr.org.za;
Kelebogile Leepile Tel: 011 482 7221 ext: 2018 Email: kelebogile@irr.org.za

IRR calls for postponement of EWC public hearings in light of COVID-19 risk

The Institute of Race Relations (IRR) yesterday sent a letter to Dr Mathole Motshekga, chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Amending Section 25 of the Constitution, urgently requesting the postponement of all public hearings relating to the parliamentary process of expropriation without compensation (EWC) in view of the risk of such hearings promoting the spread of COVID-19, also known as the Coronavirus.

The first South African case of COVID-19 was confirmed yesterday – 5 March – in KwaZulu-Natal, on the same day of the Ad Hoc Committee’s launching its public hearings in the province. The EWC hearings are currently scheduled to move to a further six provinces, ending in Citrusdal in the Western Cape on 5 April.

President Ramaphosa yesterday seemed to strengthen the IRR’s call for treating the threat of COVID-19 with the gravity it deserves when he warned that the virus would turn into a “national crisis” and have a “huge” impact on the country.

The IRR’s letter, sent in the name of IRR Campaigns Manager Hermann Pretorius, makes the case that “[a]ccepted overseas practice is clearly for governments, sports

bodies, and other organisations to make every effort to halt or delay the spread of COVID-19. Governments have taken several steps towards this end, the cancellation of public meetings being one of the most significant.”

Highlighting this in its letter to Dr Motshekga, the IRR makes it clear that, should the public hearings not be halted until such time as “the risks from COVID-19 have conclusively been countered”, it would consider legal action.

“Having already extended the process of public submissions on amending Section 25 of the Constitution and the period for the Ad Hoc Committee to do its work, it would be highly irresponsible for Parliament not to take the necessary steps to protect South Africans through a similar approach to the public hearings. Halting the hearings now, and restarting them at a safer time, would protect the fundamental right of South Africans to safely participate in the protection of property rights,” said Pretorius.

He added: “The IRR will not stop fighting for the fundamental rights of South Africans – whether it is the right to own what has been earned through hard work via secure property rights, or the ability of all to participate in constitutional democracy.”

Ends