



**SOUTH AFRICAN
INSTITUTE OF
RACE RELATIONS**

Established in 1929

The Minister of Police
Mr Nathi Mthethwa
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(012) 393 2812

15 April 2011

Open letter on the death of Andries Tatane

Dear Mr Mthethwa

We have viewed the video footage of your officers beating and shooting to death Mr Andries Tatane in Ficksburg on Wednesday the 13th of April 2011. We have also taken note of the decision of the South African Police Force not to immediately suspend and arrest the officers and their commanders implicated in his death. Our moral and ethical astonishment at this decision aside we feel it necessary to point out to you the danger of the direction in which you are leading the police.

South Africa is a country that continues to confront dangerously high levels of poverty and inequality. It is the case today that just under 50% of black people live in what we define as relative poverty. This is a figure largely unchanged from that in 1994. Today just over 50% of young black men in the country are unemployed. Among young black women the figure is over 60%.

The Government's primary policy response to these figures has been service delivery and the transfer of wealth from taxpayers to poor households via social grants. Both the latter initiatives have been relatively successful. The number of households living in formal houses has doubled over a decade. The number of people receiving social grants has increased from around three million to 14 million over an even shorter period. Today a third of black households get their single biggest source of income from State handouts. Only 50% of black households report employment as their single biggest source of income. However, what these initiatives have also done is to tie the living standards of a great many South Africans directly to what the State can hand out to them.

It follows therefore that if people are not satisfied with their living standards they will lay the blame at the door of the State. When they perceive that the State does not react speedily enough to their demands for a better standard of living they protest. When they perceive that the State does not pay due regard to their protests those protests become violent. There is now survey data to show that over the past decade the proportion of people who feel that such violent protest is justified has doubled. There has also been an increase in the number of such protests and more importantly in the number of people joining such protests. These protests are now the primary form of political expression for many poor communities in South Africa.

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The potential implications of your police's actions in putting down such protest action should be apparent to you. But in case it is not we can spell it out. What the South African police are effectively engaged in is no longer a simple matter of law enforcement. Rather your officers are now at the coal face of the political struggle of poor black South Africans to be liberated from poverty. Beating, let alone shooting to death on national television, a protestor who by many accounts sought to come to the defence of others being assaulted by your police can provoke a political reaction that you will not be able to contain. It is surely not necessary to point out to anyone who has been involved in political struggle in South Africa over the past 50 years that there is precedent for this.

You need to take action to suspend and prosecute, for culpable homicide if not murder, all the officers implicated in the death of Mr Tatane. These should include the ranking officers on the scene in Ficksburg who could not exercise proper command over their men. You need to do this not just because it is the right thing to do but also because your inaction may with time contribute to a political reaction that, as we have already warned, you will not be able to contain. Your police did after all suspend two flying squad officers earlier this year for offending Winnie Mandela. What does it say then, to the people of South Africa, that the police cannot find the courage to suspend and arrest the officers who killed Andries Tatane whose only mistake was that he had the courage to confront the State in fighting for his right to dignity and a better life?

Sincerely,



Frans Cronje

Deputy Chief Executive

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