



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference PARLIAMENTARY LIAISON OFFICE



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Political Party Funding, 13th July – a collaboration between the CPLO and the Open Society Foundation of SA (OSFSA) Money and Politics Project.

The corruption of money and politics, a defining feature of South Africa's apartheid past, is threatening our young democracy and robbing the poor of their basic needs today. The absence of limits or disclosure requirements for private donations to parties - combined with parties' increasing demand for funds – has contributed to an unhealthy alliance between government and private interests that threatens to institutionalize corruption and conflicts of interest. For more than a decade, civil society activists and leaders in government and business have sounded the call for comprehensive party funding reform. They were joined by ANC leaders at the June Policy Conference when the party officially endorsed regulation of private funding of political parties. The question remained: will the ANC move from rhetoric to reform in time for Mangaung? At this very robust discussion, main inputs were given by Barbara Hogan, former Minister of Health and of Public Enterprises, Prakashnee Govender, COSATU Parliamentary Officer, and Zwelethu Jolobe, UCT Department of Politics.



Tackling Wildlife Crimes, 17th July

The illegal wildlife trade is broadly defined as a crime which directly harms the environment. Wildlife trafficking is often driven by organised groups who exploit natural resources and endanger threatened species and ecosystems in contravention of the United Nations' Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Environmental crimes by their very nature are trans-boundary using porous borders, and involve cross-border criminal syndicates characterised by irregular migration, money laundering, corruption and the exploitation of disadvantaged communities. Add indifferent governments which provide insufficient legislation and law enforcement into the mix and then you have a slight idea of the arduous undertaking that is tackling wildlife crimes. This roundtable discussion aimed to delve into Africa's journey with ivory poaching, which has resulted in scores of elephant and rhinoceros being exterminated, as well as the South African effort against abalone (perlemoen) poaching. Markus Burgener, senior programme officer for TRAFFIC delivered the keynote address.



Removing Barriers to Access and Success in Higher Education, 24th July – a collaboration with Rural Education Access Programme (REAP)

National participation rates in higher education and training for black and coloured young South Africans remain frighteningly low, even 18 years after the end of apartheid. Even more disturbing are the very poor completion rates for those students. Clearly there remain huge systemic barriers to access and success in higher education for the great majority of learners, despite the massive government investment in bursaries and loans. Speakers at this event included Dr John Pampallis, special advisor to the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Ian Scott, Director of Academic Development at UCT, and Eugene Daniels, education spokesperson: Citizen's Movement for Social Change. Their presentations looked at how the school system was preparing learners for higher education and what universities were doing to help bridge any gaps.



Rural Education – Neglected Area, 8th August – a collaboration with the Catholic Institute of Education (CIE)

Dr Adele Gordon, an independent consultant and an associate of the Centre for Education Policy Development, focused her presentation on some of the challenges faced by rural schools. These included difficult social circumstances, lack of support from the Provincial Education and Health Departments and in some cases poor infrastructure. This discussion explored what has been done, and what still needed to be done to best support these schools in rural communities.



From Violent Protest to Dialogue: How do we change the current discourse? 24th August – a collaboration with the Goedgedacht Forum for Social Reflection

Presentations were given by Bishop Kevin Dowling, the bishop of Rustenburg and CPO liaison bishop, and Mr Nqabayomzi Kwankwa of the UDM. They highlighted that for a long time there has been great concern about some of the trends in the body politic. The values of the Constitution which promote dialogue and tolerance have seemingly found little resonance in an increasingly hostile and intolerant exchange of ideas and opinions. While there is some dispute as to the exact nature of what has been termed 'service delivery protests' what cannot be disputed is that there has been a growing tendency towards angry protest and violence. The events at the Lonmin Mine brought these issues to the fore in a dramatic and tragic manner. The loss of life and the events leading up to it have highlighted a failure of many organisations. While the various sectors apportion blame, there is a concern that the lessons which need to be learned are overlooked and lost in political posturing and rhetoric.



The Plight of the Elderly: Vulnerable and Marginalized, 5th September

Roedolf Kay (national co-ordinator for South African Older Persons' Forum), Pat Lindgren (Act on Elder Abuse) and Gavin Weir (Neighbourhood Old Age Homes – NOAH) looked at issues facing the elderly in their various presentations. The question raised was whether the introduction of the Older Persons Act 13 of 2006 had made any difference in the lives of our elderly. All too often the elderly are marginalized, neglected, exploited, disrespected and fall victim to abuse.



The Chapter 9 Institutions in South Africa, 11th September – a collaboration with the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA)

In 2006, the ad hoc Committee on the Review of the Chapter 9 Institutions and Associated Institutions was established to investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of these institutions, and to establish whether they were fulfilling their constitutional mandate. The report by the ad hoc Committee revealed that these institutions faced common challenges, such as inconsistent funding processes, the inability to attract and retain staff, failure to establish a clear mandate, insufficient cooperation with civil society, poor public awareness and education, and mismanagement. The Committee made recommendations to assist the Chapter 9s to fulfill their Constitutional mandate. This roundtable discussion looked at whether these recommendations had been taken to heart, and whether the institutions were functioning effectively and efficiently. The keynote speaker was Dr Yvette Abrahams (Gender CC SA – Women For Climate Justice) with responses heard from Adv. Nkosi (Office of the Public Protector), Mr Mawethu Mosery (IEC Provincial Electoral Officer) and Ms Janine Hicks (Commission on Gender Equality).



Language in Education: Moving beyond just English and Afrikaans, 19th September

Despite the fact the South African Constitution recognizes 11 official languages, this has not, as yet, been translated into a coherent language-in-education policy. And, as the late Neville Alexander observed, it is the failure to use and respect children's first languages in learning and teaching that contributes to underachievement and high dropout rates. Mr Peter Pluddeman (Language Education Department: UWC Faculty of Education), and Dr Vuyokazi Nomlomo (Senior Lecturer: UWC Faculty of Education), delivered presentations which focused on the impacts.



Deepening Democracy: Public Participation and the Experience of Communities, 20th September – a collaboration with the Democracy Development Programme (DDP), the Black Sash and the Goedgedacht Forum for Social Reflection

Presentations were heard by Colleen Ryan (DDP) and Gavin Weir (NOAH) which looked at crucial elements to a vibrant, healthy democracy and active citizenry. Unfortunately, the recent past has indicated a decline in the quality of participation in democratic structures and processes which make up our democracy. It is essential that these matters are addressed urgently. The events at the Lonmin Mine have highlighted what the consequences could be when democratic structures break down.



The Morbidity and Mortality of Children: The First 1000 Days – Changing the Future, 26th September

The Global 1000 Days Campaign states that 'the 1000 days between a woman's pregnancy and her child's 2nd birthday offer a unique window of opportunity to shape healthier and more prosperous futures. The right nutrition during this 1000 day window can have a profound impact on a child's ability to grow, learn, and rise out of poverty.' Speakers at this event included Adv. Paul Hoffman and Adv. Chris Shone from the Institute for Accountability, as well as Prof. Andrew Argent and Dr Christiaan Scott of the Red Cross Children's Hospital.



Corruption, Money and Politics: a Lethal Cocktail, 11th October – a collaboration with the Goedgedacht Forum for Social Reflection

Speakers included Gary Pienaar from the Money and Politics Programme at OSFSA and Anele Mtsweni from the Helen Suzman Foundation.



Public Transport as a Social Good, 23rd October

This event was scheduled during transport month. Main inputs were given by Prof. Marianne Vanderschuren (associate professor: Department of Civil Engineering UCT) and Mr Andrew Wheeldon (executive director: Bicycling Empowerment Network). The presentations were well balanced, with presenters giving an overview of current non-motorised transport initiatives as well as the city's IRT system. The speakers were critical of the MyCiti system, arguing that it is expensive and not necessarily providing a service where it is most needed.



Social Grants: The National Planning Commission's Vision, 31st October – a collaboration with the Goedgedacht Forum for Social Reflection and the Hanns Seidel Foundation

The main speaker, Prof. Vivienne Taylor, gave a broad overview of the National Planning Commission's recommendations (in the National Development Plan) regarding social grants. As a commissioner, Prof. Taylor stressed that civil society still needed to engage with the content of the NDP to ensure that the recommendations are taken forward. She also stressed that government has a constitutional obligation to look after citizens who cannot provide for themselves. Both respondents, Mr Temba Nolutshungu (Free Market Foundation) & Mr Nkosikhulule Nyembezi (Black Sash) ensured for a lively discussion. Mr Nolutshungu argued that the social grant net should not be widened but rather government should, with the help of the market, create jobs. This will ensure that there is less of a burden on the state, and thus the taxpayer, to provide social grants. Prof. Taylor, however countered that the bulk of the cash payments are to pensioners (over the age of 60) and children. Both these groups are not in the "employment net" and by creating jobs the state would not necessarily lift people out of poverty. The roundtable attracted a big crowd – which represented a cross-section of people – from parliamentary researchers, academic researchers and church-based organizations and NGOs.



Difficulties Confronting Families, 14th November – a collaboration with the Goedgedacht Forum for Social Reflection and the SACBC Family Life Desk

Presentations were made by Joan van Niekerk (Childline SA advocacy and training manager, and president elect: International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) and Toni Rowland (SACBC Family Life Desk).

Acid Mine Drainage: A Legacy of Mining in South Africa, 28th November – a collaboration with the Justice and Peace Department and the Goedgedacht Forum for Social Reflection

Mining has played a key role in the economy, history and demography of South Africa. The contribution of the mines to the economy over the past century has taken precedence, while the social injustices and negative environmental impacts that accompanied mining have been underplayed or ignored by the mining houses and government. The situation has worsened significantly over the past few years due to the abandonment and pending closure of most of these mines; the mining companies have been perceived as reluctant to take responsibility for the damage caused in the form of pollution and ecological degradation by mining. Acid mine drainage (AMD) is one such unpleasant legacy of mining in South Africa. At this discussion, addressed by Professor Ewa Cukrowska from Wits University and Mr Fortress Netili from the Council of Geosciences, concerns were raised around the AMD problem and how it affected communities.



Seminar on Western Sahara: Africa's Last Colony, 7th December

Since 1975 the former Spanish colony of Western Sahara has been unlawfully occupied by its northern neighbour, Morocco. Despite UN resolutions, and in defiance of the African Union's position, Morocco refuses to withdraw and to hand over sovereignty to the Saharawi people, 20% of whom live as exiles in Algeria and Spain. Western Sahara is a member of the African Union, and has been recognized by over 80 countries, including South Africa. Alouat Hamoudi, a peace studies Masters student at the University of Notre Dame, USA addressed a small group of people. Alouat, was born in Western Sahara, and has been directly affected by the conflict; his parents have been living in southern Algeria as refugees since 1975. He shared some of his personal experiences and highlighted what the future held for this struggling nation.

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Responses

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- Crime Statistics 2011-2012
- Textbooks and Targets
- The MTBPS in Context

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