

Archbishop of Cape Town speaks about visit to Tatane family and Easter hope

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The Archbishop of Cape Town, Dr Thabo Makgoba, reflects on his visit to the Tatane family in Ficksburg and sends a message of Easter Hope to all South Africans amidst this despairing situation.

Tuesday in Holy Week this year was a very long day. As I sat in the Bloemfontein airport lounge, preparing to board the 6:05pm plane to Cape Town I realised that my emotions were very raw as I reflected on the day. I had left Cape Town at 6:00am to fly to Bloemfontein and then to be driven to Meqheleng, outside Ficksburg.

It had been a very long Journey - long in kilometres but also long in terms of feeling the longing for justice to be done and for the poorest of the poor to receive even the most basic services as guaranteed them in our Constitution. The occasion was a very sad one. Most South Africans would have read about it - the tragic death of Andries Tatane, aged 33, of Ficksburg and the injuries to his fellow community members.

Andries and his community members were demanding justice to be done. They wanted to be treated with dignity, to have safe drinking water and proper sanitation - not the bucket system toilets. They went to present their petition to their elected representative, their Mayor, but were met with water cannons, ironically being attacked with the very thing they don't have the pleasure of in their daily lives. And if that were not enough, then came a disproportionate police force which claimed Andries' young life.

A dedicated teacher and community worker, he paid with his life to get the attention of his elected leaders. Minister Shiceka should visit and see the appalling conditions under which God's people live. Minister Tokyo Sexwale should visit too and provide houses. Minister Nathi Mthethwa and President Zuma should publicly apologise for this embarrassing act of aggression by police. And the commander who issued the instruction to shoot must be arrested too. I hope this is not to be accepted as a tacit demonstration of the police policy 'shoot to kill.'

As we approach Easter, a season of life and hope, I want to send my condolences again to the Tatane family, as I did verbally on Tuesday. I pray that they may have the strength and courage and faith to get through this terrible time in their lives. In addition to the tragedy of Andries' death, which was 'shared' with South Africans and the world through the media, I also pray that the family will have adequate compensation to build a new home and an opportunity to rebuild their lives, and that Andries's death will ensure that all the Meqheleng residents will also have better houses and adequate services.

I pray for hope and fearlessness in demanding that we be served by our elected leaders. I pray we too may come to know our responsibilities to one another. Perhaps this may be a positive outcome of the very public nature of this violent tragedy - that we may turn our outrage into actions - actions which will lead to better lives for all our sisters and brothers who still suffer from the indignities which failed delivery of basic services imposes on their lives.

We can all begin by taking our upcoming local elections seriously. In our voting may we prayerfully consider - who will get the job done? And once the elections have taken place and our elected leaders are in place, let us demand leadership with results - especially for the poorest of the poor. They have listened to promises for too long. And those of us who are privileged to have basic services and more, we cannot be silent any longer. We are one family - God's family - and we have responsibilities to one another.

NOTE: Archbishop went to Ficksburg in his capacity as Patron of the EMN and chair of the Eminent Persons' Group of the EMN. The Anglican Bishop of the Free State is the local Bishop and All Saints Anglican Church is located in the town of Ficksburg.

For more information, contact Siya Gidi (EMN) at 0729350892 [begin_of_the_skype_highlighting](#) 0729350892 [FREE_end_of_the_skype_highlighting](#) or Wendy Tokata (Office of the Archbishop) at 021 763 1320

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