

# 'Assault on democracy'

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**INLSA CITY UNDER SIEGE:** Instances of the trauma the city has suffered during the year include when street traders had to fight off looters in St Georges Mall when a group of protesters at the Western Cape Provincial Legislature turned violent. Photo: Ian Landsberg

## **Michelle Jones and Cobus Coetzee**

A GROUP of prominent Capetonians, including archbishops Desmond Tutu and Thabo Makgoba, has written a hard-hitting statement slamming attempts by “a group of political activists” to “promote a climate of hate” and destabilise the province through violent protests.

They warned that if what they termed a concerted campaign to destabilise the Western Cape was not stopped, it could spread across the country.

They called on all South Africans to refuse to accept threats of ungovernability and rather promote human dignity and equality.

The majority of the 86 signatories are religious leaders, including Mohammed Kagee of Claremont Main Road Mosque, Catholic parish priest Christopher Clohessy of Newlands/Claremont, Zen Buddhist Heila Downey of Robertson and former city mayor Gordon Oliver of the Unitarian Church.

Individuals included Louise Asmal, Rhoda Kadalie, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, Paul Hoffman, Fanie du Toit and Terry Crawford-Browne.

Their statement read: “The proper delivery of services to the poor by the public administration in the Western Cape province and across the country is inadequate, and it is understandable that poor people are feeling frustrated and angry.

“However, constructive engagement on the best way forward is possible and necessary without resorting to violence, and without fomenting hate or disrespect.”

They wrote that the democratic process was “currently under severe assault by a group of political activists in the Western Cape.

“Because they were not chosen by the electorate, who preferred to have a different party ruling the province, they have set in place a campaign to destabilise the Western Cape and make the province ungovernable. This has created space for other political groups to also join in destabilisation.”

The ANC Youth League was singled out a number of times as being responsible for these attacks.

The signatories’ action was “not a statement in support of any political party”, and they believed that “there are democrats in all political parties who share our view”.

They wrote that public statements by some activists before the action began had confirmed the aim of the destabilisation project which had since been put in motion.

The statement pointed out that on July 27 last year, a memorandum had been handed to the Premier’s Office from the ANC youth and women’s leagues, the Cape Amalgamated Taxi Association and the Congress of Democratic Taxi

Associations which called for their demands to be met, otherwise they would make “this city and province ungovernable”.

This had resulted in “major concerns”, including:

I Violent service delivery protests: Bus driver Andile Hoko died when stones were thrown at his bus in August;

I Hindering and disrupting meetings about service delivery: The launch of the Saldanha Bay Industrial Development Zone was disrupted and DA Leader Helen Zille booed off the stage by ANC supporters;

I Preventing freedom of speech and freedom of movement, and promoting a climate of hate: Protest leader Andile Lili warned Western Cape Premier Helen Zille to be careful when entering informal settlements around the province.

The writers noted that this was not a problem unique to this province. “The deep problem is that the nature of these actions in the Western Cape is indicative of what we may expect in other parts of the country in the future. There is every reason to expect that unless the destabilisation campaign is stopped in its tracks now in the Western Cape, it will grow across the country.”

They wrote that these protests were “not enhancing the welfare of those in desperate situations”.

“We urgently need constructive discussions between the communities and authorities about what is practicable in terms of housing and sanitation: what the authorities can provide, and, recognising resource limitations, what local communities can do to help themselves as regards housing and sanitation.”

The writers called on all citizens to “demand accountability for a better life for all”.

“We call on all people of goodwill to take a stand against what is happening, and stand up for treating each other with respect. We call on the religious communities as well as politicians of all parties to call on the activists engaged in this destabilisation project to cease and desist and return to the values that this country is supposed to uphold. We call on all people to stand against violent protests and calling for ungovernability.”

The statement was created after UCT maths professor George Ellis started an e-mail conversation.

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<http://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/assault-on-democracy-1.1612851#.VCEkDhacxfg>