

## **Pietermaritzburg Pensioners Forum**

### **To all Media**

**Media Alert: Pietermaritzburg Pensioners travel by bus from Pietermaritzburg to Parliament in Cape Town to ask government to provide all pensioners with a bonus in December and to increase pensions to the level of a living wage.**

**30 October 2018**

### **SINGOGOGO ASENEME NEZE NGEMPESHENI.**

We are a forum of women pensioners who live in Pietermaritzburg. On the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2018 several of our members got on a bus in Pietermaritzburg to go to Cape Town, to make a presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2018. After listening to Minister Mboweni's Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement we saw that government thinks we are invisible. Our reality as pensioners seems to be completely ignored. We decided that we should go to parliament and talk directly to MPs because we are very worried about our situation as pensioners who rely on the old-age grant to care for our families and we feel that parliament should be very worried too. Government must do something to help us. We are 3,4 million pensioners. We left our lives, our grandchildren and families to travel all the way to Cape Town on a bus because government must see us. We must not be ignored.

Most of us when we worked we did horrible jobs – we were domestic workers, factory workers, farm workers and shop assistants. We faced the worst racial discrimination and oppression in the work place; we earned the lowest wages; and when we retired we left with nothing. We did not earn enough to support our families and put away any savings for our retirement. When we retired our only option was to go onto the government old-age grant.

The R1 700 a month means that having worked our whole lives and having contributed to the economy of South Africa; we continue to live in terrible poverty. Because of our massive levels of unemployment our pensions are under more strain because we must support our children who cannot find work. We look after our children's children because our children cannot support them on the low wages they earn, because the Child Support Grant of R410 a month is too little or because they are unemployed. We clothe, feed and send our grandchildren to school. Everything has gone up: VAT, food, omalume to take our children safely to school, electricity and water, burial insurance and school uniforms, shoes, socks, books, stationery and school tours. We cannot make it through the month on our pensions and most of us are in terrible debt. We are getting sick from the stress and from not eating properly.

Several months ago, we started asking ourselves why we never see pensioners protesting in the street against the poverty-level old-age grant? We started speaking to our friends and neighbours, our communities in Pietermaritzburg and other pensioners we know from across South Africa. We realised then that many pensioners are scared to protest because pensions in most families are the only reliable source of income that comes into homes. We started asking questions about why so many of us are forced to rely on the old-age grant? We linked the old-age grant to not earning enough when we worked. For us, the old-age grant is not a gift from government. Government has a responsibility to support us in our old age. We contributed and sacrificed so much for South Africa and so that our children would have a better future than we did. We continue to contribute to South Africa in our old-age. Our pensions keep many urban economic hubs going. Our pensions support our children and grandchildren. Our pensions subsidise low wages and unemployment. Without the money coming into our homes via the old-age grants, in many places there would be no economic activity at all.

Our pensions play a significant role in keeping the economy of South Africa going. They play a substantial role in ensuring that children are fed and clothed and are in school; and that they are taken care of when they are sick. Pensioners should not be invisible. We must be included in the plans for South Africa's future and included in proposals to get South Africa out of its economic crisis. We want to participate in the economy. Increasing our pensions would help us to be able to buy and sell the things we make to people who live close to us. We can get the economy out of its problems. We want our pensions to be increased to make sure that ourselves, our grandchildren and children can live well and be healthy and strong. We are 3,4 million pensioners.

We would like government to consider giving all pensioners a double-pension in December (ibhonasi ngoDesemba). This would be an important first step that can help us deal with the immediate crisis we face as December approaches (we explain why we are asking for this down the page). We would also like government to increase the monthly pension to a level that allows us to meet our consumption expenditures whilst giving us a surplus so that we can bring money home from town and invest that money in our communities where we live. This will help South Africa get out of the economic crisis whilst also helping us to cope with the massive increases in the costs of basic consumption goods and services.

*We have started a campaign for all pensioners to receive a bonus in December (R1 700 + another R1 700 = R3 400). We hope that we can use the bus trip to parliament, our time in parliament and the next several months to universalise this campaign across South Africa so that all pensioners and society can be part of calling for this demand. We are not going to stop until all pensioners receive a bonus in December.*

**We ask that government doubles our pensions in December 2018.**

The pension plays the same role as a wage does. It brings income into our homes. The pension is R1 700 a month. For many pensioners, it is the only source of income coming into homes.

December and January are very difficult months. With our pensions we must cover the usual expenses plus the extra expenses of school uniforms, shoes, stationery and extra food (because our grandchildren are on holiday and they are always hungry). This year has been very tough because everything has gone up in price and our monthly pensions cannot cover these price increases. We start out every year in terrible debt and this year is going to be much worse.

We are asking government to help us. Giving all pensioners a double-pension in December will help absorb some of the pressures we face. The extra money will be used to buy school uniforms, shoes and stationery. Prices are cheaper in December than they are in January. We will also use the extra money to pay the first instalments for school fees and the January's scholar transport fees to the uncles that take our kids to school. We can sometimes get a discount on fees and transport if we pay upfront. The extra pension would make a huge difference because our children will be much better prepared for the New school year as most costs will be covered. It would also help us because we will not have to go into such terrible debt to make sure these costs are covered.

The extra pension will also help us to buy food. Food prices go up in December and we also must buy more food during this time because our children spend more time at home during the holidays and we must feed them properly. It also helps to keep our children close to home and secure and make sure that they are healthy and in a much better position when school starts in the New Year.

Christmas is an important time to rest and reconnect as families. It is one of the few moments where families can come together, relax and find peace. This year has been so hard. We need this time so that we can enter the New Year feeling refreshed and positive.

The extra pension would help us ensure that our school going grandchildren will be much better prepared for New School year. This will be good for teachers in classrooms and nurses in clinics. The extra pension would also be important for us so that we do not start the New Year in so much debt. We could be much more financially secure.

It would also be very good for the economy because we will be able to use the Stokvel monies which we save by sacrificing so much for during the year, to be spent on productive use instead of just consumption goods. We save in stokvels during the year. It would be much better if we can take those savings and use them to invest in our small businesses we do then to spend all that money on school things and food. We sacrifice so much to save, it is not good that all that money is just left in town and we cannot put it to productive use. We want to start putting money into things which help us live better and be more financially secure.

*Providing all 3,4 million pensioners with a bonus in December will cost ± R5,8 billion. This is a lot of money. It is relatively equivalent to the R5,57 billion reprioritised to e-tolls. It seems to us that government does have the money to provide all pensioners with a bonus in December 2018. It makes more sense for the money to go directly into South African pockets to help 3, 4 million pensioners and their families and act as an economic stimulus by bringing money into the local economy than for billions to go into the e-tolls system, with that money going into one hand and where much of that money will go overseas; instead of much of the ±R5,8billion coming back to government in various forms via Corporate Income Tax, VAT, improved education and health outcomes and lowered debt levels for millions of South Africans.*

**We ask that government increases our pensions to a living wage in April 2019.**

The pension is R1 700 a month. We cannot survive on it. It is far too low. We cannot live healthy lives on it, it just keeps us in poverty. This year is even worse because this year has been so hard. Everything has gone up. Fuel has gone up. Electricity has gone up. Transport to send our grandchildren to school has gone up. VAT has gone up. Food prices have gone up. The pension is not keeping up with the shocks in prices.

In October government gave us an extra R10. What was that? R10 in the face of the shocks did not help us. Splitting the pension increase in April and October does not help us. We are very angry about this. We need the full pension to be paid out in April of every year.

We are of the age group that when we worked we received the lowest wages. We did the worst type of work and faced the worst racial oppression and exploitation under apartheid and as the new Democracy was working itself out to try and improve working conditions and wages. We did not earn enough when we worked to live and to save for our retirement. Our only option when we retired was to go onto the government Old-Age Grant. We worked our whole lives and have now ended up in terrible poverty.

The pension plays the same role as a wage does. It brings income into our homes. We are 3,4 million pensioners. Many of us live in homes where nobody works. Our children do not work. There are no jobs. Our families survive on our pensions. Our expenses did not become less when we retired. We must still cover all the expenses we used to cover when we worked. Things are expensive, in Pietermaritzburg our expenses come to around R7 000 a month.

We are asking that government increase the monthly pension to a living wage of R8 000. R1 700 is far too low. We stand in the queue to collect the old age grant and then go and stand in the line to borrow money. It is a poverty grant and it is not enough to help us. We spend all the money in a few hours on food, electricity, transport, education, scholar transport, debt repayments and burial insurance. We come home with nothing. We leave all our money in town.

We have no money to bring home where we live. We have no money to support local economic activities where we live. We make things, but nobody has any money where we live to buy the things we make. We cannot support others who make things too. We also can't grow our small businesses. We would like to invest in our small businesses. We would like to invest in our homes – to expand our houses and fix them. To create wealth where we live. But we can't because we have no extra money.

Increasing the pension to a living wage would help us better support our families and make sure that our children and grandchildren's futures are much brighter and more stable. This would be good for government because it would mean that less money would have to be spent in the public health sector, our children would be able to maximise their education and would be able to gain knowledge and skills which would mean that South Africa would have a much stronger economic base as its workforce will be stronger, healthier and better skilled.

South Africa is struggling to create jobs. The situation is terrible and getting worse every day. If government invests in us, 3,4 million pensioners, money will come directly into our pockets – we will have extra money to spend where we live, and we will be able to change the economy around very quickly. We will be able to create work where we live.

Doubling the pension in December and increasing the pension to a living wage could really make a huge difference for so many millions of families and it also will help government because 3,4 million pensioners and our families will be in a much better financial position and we will be able to use our money more productively and create work. If government does not do this, millions of families are going to enter 2019 in levels of debt we have not seen yet. It will be very bad for South Africa. The economy will continue to decline, and our lives will get worse.

Thina Ogogo.

#### **Pietermaritzburg Pensioners Forum**

**For more information and to catch up with us on the bus from Pietermaritzburg to Cape Town, and in parliament and Cape Town, and on our way home; please contact:**

Gog'Faith Mofokeng	072 810 7887
Gog'Thoko Ngubane	076 772 3521
Gog'Doreen Taylor	082 472 2354
Gog'Hilda Mbasu	060 695 5973
Gog'Fikile Gumede	084 038 4536
Gog'Tholani Ndlovu	060 781 3209
Gog'Mahosazana Sindane	No number use 082 472 2354

**For communication and logistical assistance contact Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity Group (we will be on the bus and in parliament with The Pietermaritzburg Pensioners Forum).**

Nokwazi Chiya	073 794 8285
Julie Smith	072 324 5043

#### **Logistical information:**

**Depart PMB** at 12:30 on Tuesday 30 October, Greyhound bus (McDonalds Bus Stop, Burger Street).

**Arrive CT** at 09:15 on Wednesday 31 October, Greyhound bus (Long Distance Bus Facility, Old Marine Drive).

After arriving in CT, we will make an oral submission to The Standing Committee on Finance and the Select Committee on Finance on the 2018 Medium Term Budget Policy Statement. Parliament: Committee Room V227, second floor, Old Assembly Building. The hearings start at 10:00. We will probably only arrive at the hearings around 11:00.

**Depart CT** at 12:00 on Thursday 1 November, Greyhound bus (Long Distance Bus Facility, Old Marine Drive).

**Arrive PMB** at 08:50 on Friday 2 November, Greyhound bus (McDonalds Bus Stop, Burger Street).