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27 March 2019

To: MMC De Jager

Dear MMC

We proposed to meet with you over three weeks ago to resolve a number of issues of concern to Reclaimers in Johannesburg. Thus far, you have failed to respond to our requests. After a series of General Meetings, Reclaimers have decided to embark on a protest March on the 18th April 2019, now postponed to the 2nd May. Forgive us for writing such a long missive, but this letter is a consequence of your failure to speak to us.

The issues we asked you to meet us over are as follows;

1. Following a year and a half of negotiations and a lot of sacrifices on the Reclaimers part; we have now started with registration of all workers. However, despite the fact that we spend time mobilising and helping with registration, Pikitup and EISD have refused to help us with food, transportation or even some compensation for losing out on work. We have read all the articles in the newspapers and heard you on Radio talking about how important Reclaimers are. Yet we remain invisible to you. You remain blind and deaf to our sacrifices and good faith in making recycling a success in the city. Reclaimers are not even mentioned in IDP documents.
2. After two years of negotiations and effort to organise ourselves, you have failed to make any provision for us in the City's budget. Yet the informal sector saves the City millions of Rands in landfill space and the fact that we reduce the amounts you spend on your fleets by reducing the amount of waste picked from households. In effect, WE are the ones who subsidise you, whilst ensuring that the Johannesburg has recycling rates comparable to European cities.
3. PikitUp and the City have failed to sign the Framework agreement that was negotiated and submitted in September 2018. This means that we have no agreed processes on how integration will proceed and there has been no substantial implementation other than the Registration process. The Framework agreement provides for the establishment of appropriate For a to discuss our concerns and bring innovative solutions to you.
4. We would also like to discuss and negotiate social plans around the closure of landfills such as Marie Louise. There are international best practices on how Reclaimers and cities can cooperate on landfill closures. You and officials who report to you, have simply ignored us and do not feel that Reclaimers and their interests must be accommodated when plans are made that affect their livelihoods. Yet, the City collects statistics on impressive recycling rates based on our work in landfill sites. We have no access to sanitation facilities, no agreed processes to deal with issues of health and safety. However, we are expected to clean these landfills without pay and safety equipment. We are even required to clean drainage and overflow systems with no safety equipment and are expected to pay our own medical bills if we fall ill from this dangerous work. Your failure to ratify the Framework agreement means that we have no recognised, rule-based methods to

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- raise concerns and more importantly to propose solutions with confidence that agreements would be implemented.
5. In 2017, we proposed a plan for the incorporation of the informal sector that addresses all your concerns about working with unorganised people, whilst addressing the fact that over 90% of all Coops that the City has tried to initiate have ended in failure. We proposed the urgent implementation of recycling hubs, using existing infrastructure in 2017. These facilities would reduce distances travelled by reclaimers, avoid road accidents and ensure efficient systems of collecting and transporting recyclables. We have waited patiently for a response and none has been forthcoming.
 6. We are about to embark on a number of Pilot projects with businesses that will address increases in prices of materials and collection rates, together with residents in Brixton and Auckland Park. We have also initiatives to collect organic waste from streets, restaurants and Fresh produce Markets. However, we have had little interest and support from Pikitup and EISD on these issues, and also have no recognised for a with decision-making powers to make these happen. We are attempting to give some of these opportunities to Reclaimers in Landfills and Female reclaimers, yet once again, we have no support from you nor PikitUp.
 7. We are concerned about your plans to sign contracts with private companies that will result in the displacement of Reclaimers and severe reductions in livelihoods. The operation of these companies led to declines of over 60% in incomes for Reclaimers working in High income areas. Yet, the City seems determined to proceed with plans and policies that are not based on any research and scant evidence of their effectiveness. Your decision to spend millions on supporting formal businesses to take recyclables away from us, has not only affected Reclaimers. They have also forced many to start sleeping in open spaces near people's homes, so as to be first to collect recyclables to compete against these companies. This is another example of how policies are implemented without evidence and that these have unintended consequences for rate payers. Reclaimers are clear that they have no interest in seeking employment from the City. We want a partnership that will work and has been proven to work in many BRICS countries. We have tried to cooperate with the City despite being ignored on everything except Registration.
 8. We have listened to your media interviews and your declarations of support for a sector that is responsible for collecting 90% of recyclables. Yet we are being pushed aside. We now have the benefit of clear research from WITS that provides substantive evidence on the ineffectiveness of your policies on recycling, even the unintended consequences of such policies including the fact that greater numbers of Reclaimers now tend to sleep in streets outside residents' houses and in public spaces. Many of these developments have been made worse by poorly researched and poorly conceived policies.
 9. Finally, the City has claimed that it is in support of the recently adopted Guidelines on Waste Picker Integration adopted by the Department of Environment. Yet, your refusal to meet us to discuss solutions that will cost the city less money and guarantee our livelihoods run contrary to your public statements and commitments. Why must poor people always resort to Marches and demonstrations to get politicians and officials to fulfil their promises?
 10. Please take note that our March will have the following stops;
 - a. Pikitup Offices
 - b. MMC's Office
 - c. The Mayor's office