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**To: The President**  
Mr Cyril Ramaphosa

Per e-mail:

Cc'd to:

**Cc: The Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs**  
Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma

Per mail:

**Cc: The Deputy Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs**  
Mr Obed Bapela

Per e-mail:

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10 February 2021

Dear President Ramaphosa,

**RE: REQUEST TO BE INCLUDED IN THE PRESIDENCY'S MEETINGS WITH INTERFAITH LEADERS**

1. Thank you for your kind attention to the matters raised in this communication.
2. *Freedom of Religion South Africa NPC (FOR SA)* is a legal advocacy organisation working to protect and promote the constitutional right to religious freedom in South Africa. In the matter of COVID-19 and the impact of the regulations on the religious community of South Africa, *FOR SA* has been mandated by religious leaders and organisations representing between 15.5 million and 18.5 million people from a cross-

spectrum of churches, denominations and faith groups, to engage with Government and make submissions on their behalf (as we have been doing since mid-March 2020 when the national state of disaster was first declared).

3. During a high-level meeting convened by the COGTA Parliamentary Portfolio Committee and attended by Deputy Ministers Obed Bapela and Parks Tau on 24 June 2020, *FOR SA* was given the assurance that we would be included in future interfaith consultations with Government to be able to represent and express the views of our constituency.
4. Subsequently, as you will recall, *FOR SA* was accorded the privilege of attending and making a contribution to the meeting of interfaith leaders which you convened on 2 September 2020. We were grateful for this opportunity because the vast majority of the structures represented by *FOR SA* in this matter, do not form part of (and/or their views on this matter are not currently represented by) the South African Council of Churches (SACC).
5. *FOR SA* understands that the SACC and other interfaith groups were consulted by you, Mr President, on 10 January 2021, following which the ban on all faith-based gatherings imposed on 29 December 2020, was confirmed indefinitely.
6. Despite the inclusion of *FOR SA* at a previous meeting with yourself, where we were able to present the views of the constituency we represented (on that occasion of over 15 million people from a wide cross-section of the religious community), *FOR SA* was neither notified of, nor included as a participant, in the afore-mentioned consultation on 10 January 2021.
7. As a consequence, many of our constituency of the churches and religious organisations who have given us a mandate to represent them in this matter, feel that their voices have not been heard and that their views and contributions have been marginalised. This has unfortunately contributed to a great sense of uncertainty, and also frustration, amongst many of our constituents and indeed churches and religious organisations in broad.
8. We now understand that the SACC has written to you on 25 January 2021, outlining various concerns regarding the recent ban on faith-based gatherings (which was subsequently lifted on 1 February 2021) and the status and role of religious ministers as

essential workers in terms of the vaccination roll-out, and are requesting a further meeting with yourself.

9. In the circumstances, and with a view to allowing us to be properly informed of, involved in and meaningfully contribute to the ongoing consultations with regards to the religious sector, *FOR SA* respectfully requests:

9.1. That *FOR SA* be formally listed in the Office of the Presidency dealing with religious stakeholders (as we understand the SACC and other religious organisations are).

9.2. That *FOR SA* be furnished with the minutes of meetings held with religious stakeholders to date, including specifically the meeting on 10 January 2021.

9.3. That an undertaking be given that *FOR SA* will be included in any consultations with, and correspondence from, the Presidency regarding this matter.

9.4. To the extent that the above requests are not granted for inclusion and participation in the ongoing consultations affecting the religious sector and our constituents in particular, the reasons therefor will be provided.

We trust that our letter will receive your favourable consideration and look forward to receiving your reply by close of business on **Wednesday, 17 February 2021.**

Yours faithfully,

**Adv Nadene L. Badenhorst**

Legal Counsel, *FOR SA*