



Ministry of Economic Development
Ministry of Environmental Affairs
Ministry of Department of Trade and Industry
Ministry of Police
Mayor Ndlela, Msunduzi Municipality

11 November 2015

Dear Mayor Ndlela and National Ministers,

I write on behalf of Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) to express our concerns regarding recent developments at the Pietermaritzburg landfill and to encourage the municipality to engage with wastepickers and their support NGO groundWork to find a constructive way forward.

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research policy network of academics, policy makers and informal worker organizations from 40 countries that seeks to improve the living and working conditions of workers in the informal economy. We work closely with waste picker organizations and policy makers around the world to formally integrate waste pickers into municipal waste management systems and are recognized as leaders in this field. In South Africa we are honoured to work with the environmental justice NGO, groundWork, and SAWPA, and are familiar with the initiatives of waste pickers in Pietermaritzburg to form a cooperative and to participate in the establishment of a materials recover facility (MRF) at the landfill, with the support of groundWork. We believe that Pietermaritzburg is therefore well positioned to develop a sustainable waste management system that progressively integrates waste pickers, and that could serve as a model for other municipalities in South Africa.

We were therefore shocked to hear that on the morning of November 11, 2015 police were deployed to break up a protest by waste pickers at the landfill, that they utilized stun grenades and rubber bullets (injuring at least four women), and that twenty waste pickers and two groundWork staff members were taken into custody. We are pleased that they have all been released. However, it is of great concern that the municipality is turning to a security solution rather than engaging with waste pickers. The waste pickers raise legitimate grievances regarding the municipality's plans to exclude them from the landfill where they earn their livelihoods, and for security to use pellet guns to enforce this exclusion is not acceptable. Waste pickers not only support themselves and their families through their work, but make crucially important contributions to waste minimization and management, cleansing of the city and environmental protection. Evidence from leading municipalities in Asia, Latin America and Africa proves that the most effective municipal waste management systems build on the informal systems created by waste pickers and officially integrate waste pickers.

We call upon the municipality to desist from deploying the police and security forces and to meet with the waste pickers and groundWork, to ensure that waste pickers are involved in all decisions related to waste management in the municipality, and to implement the MRF immediately through a process that involves the waste pickers and relevant NGOs.

Sincerely,

JC Bonner
WIEGO: Organization and Representation Programme Director