

## **Open letter to President Jacob Zuma**

Dear Mr. Zuma

We are writing to you as concerned South Africans. Crime in South Africa is getting out of hand. Tens of thousands of South Africa are suffering the pain caused by crime. Some are terrified, little children refuse to sleep in their own beds because they are afraid and others threaten to take the law into their own hands.

We listened to your 2010 State of the Nation address and it was striking how little time was devoted to crime. Solidarity asked South Africans to comment on your State of the Nation address by sending letters to you. We were completely surprised and even shocked to see how utterly frustrated people are about crime.

A record number of 23 000 letters were sent in just over a day. This is a distress call from South Africans. This campaign does not deny what the government has already done about crime, but it does acknowledge people's feeling that crime is still out of control. People are asking, as good democrats should do: Please, government, do even more; we feel that we are under siege. Declare a more aggressive war on criminals.

This campaign is a way of venting frustrations in a constructive manner. We have created a constructive channel between ordinary South Africans and the government. After all, Solidarity has a history of constructive involvement.

We participate proactively in the shaping of the democracy, but always with the aim of strengthening the democratic environment in which our people live.

Mister President, in order to reaffirm our constructive involvement, we undertake to mobilise communities, as you requested in your State of the Nation address, to actively participate in community policing forums and community safety programmes in close cooperation with the police.

You entered the President with the image of a leader who wants to listen.

The crime letters were from people who wanted to share their pain with you. Parents whose son had been murdered wrote to you. A woman whose husband of 37 years had been murdered shared her sorrow with you. Parents shared their little children's fear with you and South Africans abroad said they want to return. South Africans have, therefore, revealed their emotions to you and asked: Dear President, help us.

The Presidency refused to take delivery of the letters. The message that South Africans got was that the president did not want to hear about their sorrow. Your spokesperson dismissed the people's sorrow as a publicity stunt. The 23 000 letters we wanted to hand over to you were from real people, with real emotions and real concerns. Many of the letters confirmed people's loyalty to South Africa. It was, therefore, a positive action by positive South Africans.

Your spokesperson said that we first had to speak to the Minister of Police. However, the Department of Police also said in an insulting statement that the ordinary people's sorrow was a publicity stunt.

Mister President, the South Africans wanted to talk to you. They commented on your speech. They wanted to talk to the president who is accessible to people. The channel they used was your hotline. You had invited them to call your hotline with any complaints.

Your spokesperson was aware of the action. The day before the action we spoke to him personally. Subsequently we confirmed with the Presidency and they agreed to receive the letters. Your Pretoria office put us through to the person in Cape Town who would receive the letters. At Parliament, the Presidency told us to go to Tuynhuis. There we were also received aggressively and we were repeatedly threatened by the police.

Mister President, we missed you – the accessible Mr. Zuma who had always listened, was gone. At the time we were standing in front of Tuynhuis, you were in the building but you were gone. We were confronted by a cold Presidency – inaccessible and aggressive.

The disappointment among the participants in the campaign was unbelievable, but it was also an indication of their determination. The message was unanimous: Go ahead with the campaign.

Mr. Zuma, we will continue with the campaign of sending letters to you. We believe that people need to speak to the president. We believe it is our duty to keep the government in touch with people's emotions.

Meanwhile the number of letters to you has grown to 40 000. It is probably a South African record for people writing to the government about a specific issue.

Mr. Zuma, the people want to talk about their problems. First prize for them would be to talk to the government. However, they will not keep quiet. We decided to create another channel to let people talk, and we have released their stories on the video website YouTube.

Mr. Zuma, we would like to channel people's frustrations in a constructive manner. This campaign is a positive campaign to make South Africa a better place for all.

Thank you



Dirk Hermann

Deputy general secretary of Solidarity and coordinator of the campaign