

Open Letter to the Special Envoy on Open Government Partnership

04 May 2016

The Hon. Ms Ayanda Dlodlo

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Open Letter to the Special Envoy on Open Government Partnership

The establishment of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) internationally in 2011 brought the promise of greater accountability, greater transparency and the fostering of citizen participation through a collaborative partnership between government and civil society. By strengthening open government we could achieve progress on our global and national commitments to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

At a national level, the goals of the OGP also gives deeper meaning to fundamental rights enshrined in the South African Constitution and to legislated obligations on the South African government. By signing up to the OGP, the South African government committed itself to the practical implementation of open government and opened itself to scrutiny both globally and locally for its delivery and implementation. In 2015, South Africa assumed a global leadership role of the OGP; this has shone the spotlight on the patchy realisation of open government across the various sectors.

Whilst we acknowledge that a few sector departments have implemented strategies and processes in line with the OGP, on the whole we are deeply dissatisfied and frustrated with the South African government’s implementation and coordination of the OGP efforts in the country.

Since the inception of the OGP in 2011, and even as a founder member, we have not had a permanent Multi-Stakeholder Public Dialogue Mechanism as required in terms of the OGP process. At best, attempts by government to include civil society in consultative initiatives on the OGP have been *ad hoc*, tentative and not sufficiently inclusive to reach a broad range of civil society and the public. This has undermined the principle of partnership; it has undermined the inherent notion of accountability and ultimately the realisation of the OGP in South Africa.

Furthermore, we are extremely alarmed with the current trend within government to deny or frustrate genuine and legitimate requests for access to information, the increase in surveillance of activists and civil society and the ever-more strident and antagonistic rhetoric from some quarters in government that casts civil society organisations as "agents of foreign interests". We therefore believe that the practical adherence to the values and mechanisms of the OGP would be an important step to counter this experience of the narrowing of the democratic space in South Africa.

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Therefore, we demand:

1. That the South African government immediately establishes a permanent, multi-stakeholder dialogue Mechanism for ensuring dialogue on the Open Government Partnership that meets at least quarterly and incorporates a broad cross-section of interested civil society and community-based organisations;
2. That the engagement at the Mechanism is based on an open call to civil society and is inclusive of organisations working on the commitment areas of the Nation Action Plan and on the OGP more broadly. The Mechanism must consist of a minimum of 12 Civil Society members, representing the 8 commitment areas and the overarching OGP area;
3. That the permanent Mechanism includes representatives of all the government departments and entities with express commitments mentioned in National Action Plan;
4. That the first meeting of the Mechanism is held within 3 months of the OGP African Regional meeting to clarify its role, mandate and operating mechanisms; and
5. That government commit sufficient resources to enable the proper functioning of the Permanent Mechanism.

We demand immediate action to undo the lack of progress of the past four years. This includes:

1. A response from the Special Envoy on OGP, Deputy Minister Ayanda Dlodlo, by no later than **25 May 2016** to this statement via p4partnership@gmail.com; and
2. Details of the scheduled Permanent Mechanism first meeting by **10 June 2016**.

Should the South African Government fail to meet our demands, we will be left with no other recourse but to seek the necessary action in terms of both the OGP's Rapid Response Policy and Articles of Governance.

Endorsed by:

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