

MEDIA RELEASE BY FFPSA

Death, like taxes, is something we all have to face. The funeral service industry in South Africa has been in the spotlight for some time for a variety of reasons. The industry in South Africa has had its fair share of bad publicity and it has become a fairly controversial sphere of business which, according to some experts, government has failed to regulate sufficiently.

It is a complex industry and has many role-players, some of whom belong to different associations or federations that often mutate to form new associations with essentially the same or similar objectives as the one it originated from. From an investigative journalist's point of view it becomes difficult to explore and determine facts as opposed to perceptions.

Recently Daily Mail reported on the National Funeral Parlour Association (Nafupa) that released a statement in which the organisation distanced itself from threats which were apparently made by a splinter group known as the National Funeral Practitioners' Association South Africa (Nafupa SA) against white, Indian and coloured funeral parlour owners.

One of the most representative associations currently is the Federation of Funeral Professionals of South Africa (FFPSA). In reaction to the Daily Mail report about a WhapsApp message doing the rounds in which non-black funeral undertakers operating in townships and rural areas were threatened, Mr Yongama Quma, a Director of the Federation of Funeral Professionals of South Africa (FFPSA) says it is regrettable that a small group of business people are resorting to intimidation and threats of violence in an attempt to monopolise and control the industry in townships.

At the time, Nkosentsha Shezi, General Secretary of the National Funeral Practitioners' Association South Africa (Nafupa SA) wouldn't confirm that this message was circulated by members of his organisation, but he said Nafupa SA has taken a resolution to "reserve townships for black funeral business".

Quma said people think the funeral market will enable them to make lots of money very quickly and they will stop at nothing to get control over it. However, we shouldn't allow certain people to further their political aspirations at the expense of ordinary South Africans. Why do we want to allow people to drive a wedge between South Africans of different races?" he remarked.

The funeral service industry is worth billions of Rand when you take all related and associated services and products into consideration. Funerals are big and important events and can quickly become costly when you start adding on additional transport, fresh flowers, catering, house tents, videography and other peripheral services. That is why a large portion of the

population has funeral cover. Whether it is formal funeral insurance or informal financial support offered by a stokvel, people know they have to make provision for funerals which demand cash up front.

The problem is not to find a service provider in times when you have death in the family, but it is important to find one that will not give you a raw deal, said Quma. “There are many unscrupulous service providers who will not hesitate to take a bereaved family’s hard-earned cash whilst they have no intention of rendering a professional service. After the funeral the family have no recourse and is often left with a huge debt and bad memories” he added.

Quma mentioned that he was by no means suggesting that only black owned businesses deliver sub-standard services or are out to cheat consumers. “Crooks are everywhere and they come in all different shapes, colours and sizes. It has nothing to do with race. We live in a democratic society and consumers should be able to decide for themselves what they want, who they want to render a service and get the best possible value for their money.”

Quma stated that the FFPSA rejects the notion of excluding certain service providers from certain areas on the basis of race and also reject the call for violence and destruction of property in the strongest possible terms. The FFPSA can only express the hope that the authorities will protect business people and their assets against such senseless crimes.

According to Quma many of the FFPSA’s member organisations are contributing massively to the communities in which they operate. Their members, big and smaller funeral establishments all over the country are providing employment and are supporting other businesses by acquiring products and services which they cannot render themselves. Some of their member organisations are also playing a vitally important role in getting entrepreneurs established in the townships and rural areas Nafupa SA is referring to.

“But that is not all”, Quma said. “Many of these well-established South African businesses have invested millions of Rand as part of their Corporate Social Investment programs. One of our member organisations has over the past five years alone invested close to R 200 million in education related projects. They have pledged 50 container libraries to schools from disadvantaged backgrounds and so far they have already delivered 45 of those 50 libraries, each of which is valued at R 500 000. They have launched a project with the Department of Basic Education in 2017 where they have pledged to invest R 150 million to build schools in disadvantaged communities and the list goes on and on. Many of these organisations are perceived to be “white owned” and therefore, according to Nafupa SA, exploiting black consumers but if you consider how they re-invest into those communities one should consider whether banning them from townships or rural areas is good common sense.”

Quma also said people living in townships and rural areas should make up their own minds as to whether they want to use these businesses which are perceived to be owned by non-blacks. Consumers should do their homework. If it is a principle decision to support only black owned businesses then consider whether it is really necessary to ban others from your township. Exercise your choices. If you don't want to use a service provider for whatever reason then don't. Having them there however, will in the very least keep other service providers on their toes. Competition is good and will prevent the monopolisation of the market. In addition to that people should consider the negative impact the banning of certain organisations from their townships could have on them personally. Remember that certain benefits you have gained in terms of your funeral policy will only apply if you make use of specified service providers. If you are no longer in a position to select those service providers you may end up losing many valuable benefits, so ask yourself, what do I stand to gain from banning that business or torching their assets?" he concluded.

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