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**PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Home Educators trying to reach Minister labeled as spammers.**

The Department of Basic Education has labeled hundreds of home educators who called in and e-mailed the Education Ministry, “spammers”, claiming “that a small grouping is opposed to the policy and has been spamming departmental officials...”

Parents began to e-mail the Ministry over the weekend of the 14/15<sup>th</sup> July and to follow-up with calls on the Monday morning to request that the Council of Education Ministers (CEM), chaired by the Minister, delay a decision to institute a new Policy on Home Education. It is estimated that as many as 1000 calls and e-mails were received.

The home education movement eventually reached out to the Ministry because months of attempts to engage with the bureaucrats within the Department of Basic Education had failed to elicit a concrete response.

“Home Educators were only asking for the Minister to hit the pause button before making a decision that was based on a number of flawed assumptions” said Christopher Cordeiro, Parliamentary and Media liaison for the Pestalozzi Trust (which is a legal defence fund for home and community-based education).

Not least of these flawed assumptions is the Department’s belief that home educators withdrew from the initial consultation process because they rejected a key discussion document. This assumption is confirmed in the DBE’s subsequent press release, “Unfortunately some of the stakeholders resigned from this process citing disagreements with the document”.

Cordeiro contends that “The reverse is the case. To use the words of the home education participants, the discussion document was ‘positively received’. The Department is therefore proceeding on a flawed assumption.

But the more we make efforts to correct this, the more the home education movement is treated as if we are talking out of turn in class and that it is now time for us to shut up.”

It is evident that the DBE’s grasp on the facts throughout this whole process has, at best, been tenuous.

Research into home schooling in South Africa is wholly inadequate. While during the consultation process home education stakeholders presented some research, it was recommended by the DBE’s own consultant that additional research was vital. Just one area that needs attention is that the

department does not have any reliable data on the number of home schoolers in the country.

Hundreds of home educators were forced to ask for an extension of the public comment period as the DBE called for comments during the end-of-year exams; the time of the year that home educated children most need their parents' support.

While home schoolers were grateful for an extension, notice of the decision to grant an extension was relayed to home education stakeholders one day after the initial comment period had already expired. By that time, home educators had already made incomplete submissions just to meet the deadline.

The Department of Basic Education says it "is confident that all comments on the policy have been adequately ventilated". Cordeiro responds "What the home schooling movement is asking for is not that our comments be 'ventilated' as if they give off a bad odour, but that we be engaged with as members of 'a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people', a foundational principle of our Constitution."

Bouwe van der Eems, Pestalozzi Trust Chairperson expressed regret at the Dept's stance, saying that "a policy based on a flawed public participation process will increase conflict with education officials."

Conflict and chaos will only hamper the right of the child, including home schooled child, to a basic education.

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(The Pestalozzi Trust is the legal defence fund for home and community-based education)