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A;SA PRESS RELEASE ON ESIDIMENI REPORT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Autism South Africa notes with deep sadness the findings of the Health Ombud, Professor Malegapuru Makgoba, in his report on the tragic release of mentally ill patients from the Life Esidimeni Health Care Centre.

The report finds that, when the Gauteng Department of Health terminated its contract with Esidimeni, almost 1,400 extremely vulnerable patients were haphazardly and ill-advisedly transferred to public hospitals and non-governmental organisation facilities. The NGO facilities were unlicensed, unprepared, under-resourced and over-crowded. In consequence, some 94 patients lost their lives by the end of 2016.

Section 9 of the Constitution provides that every person is entitled to equal protection of the law, including against unfair discrimination on the basis of disability. Section 10 requires respect for the inherent dignity of every person. Every person enjoys the right to life by virtue of section 11. Section 12 protects freedom and security of the person, including the right not to be treated in an inhuman or degrading way. And sections 26 and 27 impose on the State duties to realise every person's rights to adequate accommodation, healthcare, food and water and appropriate social security.

As the report makes clear, the State failed to protect let alone promote the rights and interests of the released patients of Esidimeni.

A;SA calls on the State to act speedily and decisively on the findings made in the report, including by implementing all its disciplinary and other recommendations. Those who caused or allowed the tragedy to unfold should be held accountable for their actions or omissions.

And those released patients of Esidimeni who remain in inappropriate, unacceptable circumstances should immediately be accorded the care and respect that the Constitution demands and they deserve.

As an active participant in our country's disability community, A;SA stands in solidarity with and pledges its support for all those persons and organisations affected by the Esidimeni tragedy. Those who have lost loved ones – and those who have lost their place of residence – are in the thoughts of A;SA.

At this time of sorrow and self-reflection, A;SA recommit itself to the achievement of its vision: *"A;SA aspires to achieve a society in which all people on the autism spectrum enjoy all rights and opportunities to meet their needs and fulfil their potentials, throughout their lives, as equal members of their families and communities"*.

The logo for Autism South Africa is a light green rounded rectangle. Inside, the letters 'asa' are written in a large, white, lowercase, rounded font. Below the letters, the words 'autism south africa' are written in a smaller, white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

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