

PRESS RELEASE 2

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We stand on the brink of arguably the most important elections since the birth of our democracy in 1994. It is also perhaps the most contested election in our history. The Peace Centre has been concerned about that fact that so many people have vowed not to vote this time around, and about the underlying tendency towards violence that bedevils so much of our society, which has been fuelled by acrimonious electioneering for the past several months.

The Peace Centre will tomorrow deploy 300 peace monitors to voting stations in Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain. These are people resident in those communities who have recently completed an intensive three-day democracy education and mediation training course, delivered by the Peace Centre and two partners: SADRA and Hillside Empowerment Centre. The training was undertaken with the financial support of the African desk of American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). AFSC, with their UK counterparts, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 for their work during two World Wars.

Some of our peace monitors will be deployed inside voting stations as observers, accredited by the IEC. Others will maintain a presence outside voting stations, assisting practically where necessary and being aware of potential conflict situations getting out of hand. They will have access to a specifically-developed app which will link them to each other, the Peace Centre's management team and to the new 24-hour telephone number of the recently-established Reaction Unit created under General Andre Lincoln to combat gangsterism and violence on the Cape Flats. The app is being piloted for potential roll-out in other elections on the continent.

We acknowledge the contribution of our compatriots from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Athlone with a generous donation of meals for our peace monitors. And we again thank AFSC for generously supporting the enormous job that was this training.

However, we also wish to highlight that this project is a pilot for interventions to prevent violence in communities in general, and gang violence in particular into the future.

South African has extraordinarily high levels of violence of every kind, from rape and domestic violence, to homicide and serious assault. General Andre Lincoln, recently appointed as head of an anti-violence and anti-gang unit that has been established in the Western Cape, has said that preventing violence is not a policing issue but a social one. By this he did not mean that the police carry no responsibility in responding to violence; rather that, that in and of itself, will never bring down our high levels of violence.

The project has piloted an approach which is entirely dependent on community ownership of and responsibility for violence prevention. An integral part of the project is a communication app which links community members with a range of emergency services, including direct contact with the Reaction Unit set up within General Lincoln's unit.

We look forward to free, fair and peaceful elections tomorrow and urge everyone to remember that their vote counts! And we are excited about the potential of our app to contribute significantly to violence prevention in our country and potentially on our continent.

Further information

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