

The greatest compassion is the prevention of human suffering through patience, alertness, courage and kindness

AMIT RAY



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**A \$500 (R9 000) INVENTION THAT MAY SAVE LIVES**  
AS HOSPITALS scour their storerooms in search of ventilators for Covid-19 patients, Israeli inventors have proposed a solution: an open-source, build-it-yourself breathing machine that costs less than \$500 (R9 000).

**CORONAVIRUS (Covid-19)**

TRAGEDY

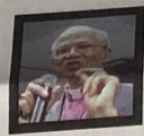
*Unchecked Red Ants, who are not an essential service, are destroying homes of poor*

# Double standards by government



MEMBERS of the Red Ants demolish shacks in Lawley Ext 2, south of Joburg. | ITUMLENG ENGLISH African News Agency (ANA)

THE initial reaction of the state to the coronavirus was commendable as President Cyril Ramaphosa moved swiftly into action to introduce measures to control the spread of Covid-19. Ramaphosa unreservedly won the hearts of many appreciative citizens united in their collective wish to see lives saved to avoid the Spanish experience – where thousands of lives were lost as that country briefly turned into another epicentre of the virus outside China. The emphasis on hygiene, as in regular washing of hands, management of sneezing and coughing, and social distancing, helped to control the spread of the coronavirus. Increasing national goodwill has seen the government and citizens come closer. And, the second phase of opening selected essential services – including service providers like plumbers – has been the mark of responsiveness in exploring what could work under lockdown regulations, while still placing primacy on societal wellbeing and keeping an eye on fighting the pandemic. The Tuesday, April 21 address by Ramaphosa in which he unveiled the stimulus package aimed at alleviating



BISHOP JO SEOKA

the negative impact of Covid-19 was even more appreciated. The amount of R500 billion towards social relief and economic support will indeed go a long way to help address social challenges and hunger. This should bring much relief given that many unemployed people were already feeling the harsh effects of poverty. This certainly spells welcome relief for small businesses that will survive for the time being. The same applies to the poor, who will have some food to put on the table for a while. But all these good gestures shall be reduced to zero if we forget the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). This is a reminder that we must treat others with kindness, decency and respect, and humanely.

With the binding call for a united national response and solidarity being on the high, we cannot pretend that all is well when the very people who are entrusted with citizens' safety, protection and care are the very ones involved in the commission of atrocious crimes. Good but poor people have suffered humiliation and death under the watch of soldiers and police. The abominable behaviour of state officials at Lawley and Orange Farm, covered by the media, must be stopped if people come first. Even if these people are illegally occupying the vacant land unlawfully, this is not the right time to punish them. They have nowhere to go to for protection. They cannot be on the streets without exposing themselves to the coronavirus and arrest, if not death, at the hands of their saviours. The Red Ants are breaking the law by being outside there, harassing innocent people. Brazen action on their part comes nowhere near performance of essential service nor are they state officials on duty. Instead, they are criminals out to add more misery by destroying poor and vulnerable people's property. An investigation must be done to

establish the ownership of the company and the identity of the person giving orders for evictions. Innocent people have been arrested for being outside their homes for essentials, including those whose homes are but an open street – the homeless. One cannot help but be suspicious that this all due to politicking as evidenced in the manufacturing of masks in the colours of some political parties or unscrupulous entrepreneurs. The government should have long ago provided houses for all citizens, especially the poorest of the poor, which is their human right. It is in times like these that we must live our pride of ubuntu, so that it is not just a cliché but practical display of who we are as a people. People must come first in our thinking, decision-making and action. Both the Red Ants and their employer must be brought to book so that a strong message is sent to all who undermined the state's authority. Although we live in anxious times, no matter how heavy the burden of loss that the coronavirus pandemic places on our shoulders, we dare not give up. We must develop hope for our country, its people and future.

The starting point and centre of concern should be the most downtrodden and least aware of the dangers that the epidemic spells to their survival. Depressed homeless people and communities such as in Lawley, Khayelitsha, Alexandra, and Diepkloof, require as much awareness as possible of the danger that this invisible enemy poses. While doing so with patience and care, the urgency with which they need to comply with regulations for safety must not translate to desperate measures leading to their harm by the very law enforcement agencies that are meant to save them from harm. Admittedly, we are still a nation in a state of becoming. The virus finds in the throes of redress the legacy of oppression so stubbornly evident in present-day South Africa. The best that we could still be is yet to come but this crisis presents us with the urgency to be the best that we could be now. We dare not fail. Bishop Seoka is a social justice activist and retired head of the Anglican Church of Pretoria. He campaigned for relief for the Marikana widows as well as for the Fees Must Fall Movement. He writes in his personal capacity.

OPPORTUNITY