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KZN Health MEC issues a warning to members of Political Parties that threaten Health Workers

KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo says the Department will do everything possible to protect its employees against attacks by members of any political party attacking them in their place of work.

This, as the Medical Manager of E.G. Usher Memorial Hospital in Kokstad, Dr Mongi Assadi, was threatened by members of the Economic Freedom Front whilst examining a patient at the casualty ward.

Dr Assadi is a Tunisian national who was recruited by an NGO, the African Health Placements, which is responsible for bringing in foreign health professionals to fill in vacant posts especially in deep rural areas.

'Dr Assadi has tenaciously been working with the Kokstad community since 2008, having agreed to come and work in an area where South African trained Doctors have shown unwillingness to stay and work in. We thus cannot allow any individual nor any member of whatever political party to threaten or harm such committed and hardworking professionals,' warns Dhlomo.

It is understood that on several occasions' now, starting mid-November, members of the local branch of the Economic Freedom Front have been sneaking in one by one into the hospital under the guise of visiting patients. Once inside, they would regroup and unfurl their T-Shirts and begin a toyi-toyi against Dr Assad and the Hospital CEO. They have even forced some nurses and other staff members to sign a memorandum that calls for Dr Assad and the Hospital CEO to resign.

On these occasions Dr Assad has been called a foreigner; informed that he is getting paid from taxpayers' money and that he will be removed and dealt with. They went to an extent of telling him that they know his car; his family and where he lives.

He has subsequently reported the matter to the Police as he feels that these attacks are Xenophobic in their nature as the people concerned are not complaining about his work performance. He says in all the eight years that he has served the hospital, there has been no incident reported about him, instead there has always been general feeling of good will and appreciation for his services by both the staff and community.

MEC Dhlomo warns that this type of action may result into dire consequences for the Kokstad community if Dr Assad and other Doctors decide to leave.

'The Department is now going to incur unbudgeted costs by providing personal security services to Dr Assad and his family due to elements that do not appreciate the difficulty we have in recruiting and retaining scarce skilled health professionals for rural hospitals. We will have no choice but to do exactly that whilst waiting for the outcome and action of that would be taken by the Police who are investigating this matter, says Dhlomo.

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For clarity, please contact: