

## NGO STATEMENT ON HELEN SUZMAN FOUNDATION RAID

22 March 2016

On Sunday afternoon the Helen Suzman Foundation (HSF) offices in Parktown, Johannesburg were the target of a military-style raid. Those conducting the raid clearly knew what they were looking for: computers and other documentation relating to the programmatic work of the HSF were taken. The brazen, co-ordinated nature of the operation and its targeted, selective focus are sinister. So, too, is its timing.

In its bid to promote constitutional democracy, the HSF undertakes vital but often politically sensitive and contentious activity. Among its most recent activities was the launch last Wednesday of an application in the Pretoria High Court to block the head of the Hawks from exercising any of his powers pending the outcome of its application to have his appointment set aside as irrational and unlawful.

We, the undersigned, are alarmed at the raid on the HSF. While we are divergent organisations, with divergent mandates, we all share a common precondition to operating, namely, independence and protection from capricious government intervention. On this principle we all stand united.

We recognise the raid as thuggery intended probably to intimidate the HSF and others in civil society engaged in promoting constitutional democracy, advancing human rights, fighting endemic corruption and protecting the Rule of Law.

The culprits of the raid have yet to be identified, but we note that it takes place in a context of increasing hostility by some within the state towards civil society. Should it be established that the perpetrators of the raid are in any way linked to police, army or intelligence functionaries, it will

represent an attack on our democracy of the gravest kind. Even absent such linkages, government is not without responsibility. The enmity currently characterising its relationship with outspoken NGOs helps encourage the view that NGOs are fair targets.

To discharge its responsibility, government will need to act swiftly and decisively. We call on it to ensure that the raid is properly investigated and the perpetrators prosecuted.

Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS)

Centre for Human Rights (CHR)

Centre for Environmental Rights

Corruption Watch

Equal Education Law Centre

Freedom Under Law (FUL)

Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR)

Legal Resources Centre (LRC)

Ndifuna Ukwazi

ProBono.Org

SECTION27

Social Justice Coalition

Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI)

South African History Archive (SAHA)

Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)

Treatment Action Campaign (TAC)

Women's Legal Centre (WLC)