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To all media houses

## **COPE Condemns Northern Cape Department of Health's Ban on Doctors' Private Work**

For Immediate Release

As the Acting National Chairperson of the Congress of the People (COPE), I strongly condemn the Northern Cape Department of Health's authoritarian decision to ban doctors from engaging in private work during their spare time.

This draconian move, announced arrogantly and disrespectfully during a meeting today, is a blatant attack on medical practitioners, professionalism, autonomy and dignity, particularly the province's scarce specialist doctors, who are already stretched thin by a mismanaged and failing public health system.

The Northern Cape, with a population of 1.3 million, is served by only two specialist psychiatrists in the public sector, an outrageous statistic that underscores the department's chronic inability to deliver adequate healthcare services. Rather than addressing this crisis by fostering a professional and collaborative relationship with these highly skilled specialists, the department has imposed a blanket ban on their right to earn a living outside of state service in their personal time. This is not only an insult to their expertise but a direct threat to the retention of critical skills in a province that desperately needs them.

The state of healthcare in the Northern Cape is a disgrace. The department has consistently mismanaged resources, failed to deliver on promises and misled the public about the true extent of the crisis. Reports from the Auditor General have repeatedly highlighted allegations of corruption, mismanagement and wasteful expenditure - issues that have eroded trust in the system and compromised patient care. Leadership instability, with senior management positions filled by individuals in acting capacities, has further undermined professionalism and clinical excellence. Political cadre deployment is at the heart of this collapse - a practice prioritising loyalty to the ruling party over competence and accountability.

We'd like to call on the Northern Cape Department of Health to immediately reverse this ill-conceived decision and engage in meaningful dialogue with doctors and specialists. The department must respect their professionalism, recognise their rights and work to build a constructive relationship that prioritises patients' needs over bureaucratic control.

Doctors are not state property. They are highly trained professionals whose skills should be nurtured, not stifled. COPE demands a healthcare system that values its scarce human resources and prioritises the well-being of Northern Cape residents. We urge the provincial government to address the root causes of this crisis - corruption, mismanagement and political interference - and to appoint competent, permanent leadership to restore trust and functionality to the health sector. The people of the Northern Cape deserve better than this shameful display of arrogance and ineptitude.

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