

Press Release



South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

For immediate release

4 December 2013

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New threat to non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

The Government - or at least one part of it - appears once again to be trying to get control of independent organisations in civil society.

The Gauteng Department of Social Development has thus published "guidelines for the selection of board members for NPOs" (non-profit organisations), the new official name for non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The guidelines state that the head of the department will establish a screening committee. Its members will include representatives of the department, municipal officials, and representatives of other organisations "as agreed by the department". Members of Parliament and/or provincial legislatures and/or ward councillors will have observer status on the screening committee.

Nominations for board members of NPOs will be advertised, and the screening committee will then finalise a "list of shortlisted nominees" who are "skilled" and "suitable".

The chief executive of the South African Institute of Race Relations, John Kane-Berman, said the guidelines, if implemented, would enable the department to weed out people it didn't like and in so doing subjugate NGO boards. Moreover, he said, it was significant that this proposal came at a time when a range of NGOs were challenging the Government on numerous different issues in the education, health, labour, security, and other fields.

"Independent NGOs are a vital component of any democracy and an essential means of holding government to account. Any attack on them should be strongly resisted," Mr Kane-Berman said. "If Gauteng gets away with it, other provinces are likely to follow suit as the African National Congress itself has previously made clear its opposition to independent institutions in civil society."

Ends.