Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities.

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EDITORS/REPORTERS **19 NOVEMBER 2026**

CRL RIGHTS COMMISSION CALLS FOR CALM, RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND MUTUAL RESPECT FOLLOWING A DISPUTE INVOLVING SIVA ALAYUM AND NEW BETHESDA CHURCH IN CHATSWORTH

The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission) notes with concern the growing public outcry and widespread reactions, particularly within the Hindu community, following developments involving the Siva Alayum of Westcliff and the New Bethesda Church in Chatsworth, KwaZulu-Natal.

The matter concerns a structure erected by the Siva Alayum on property reportedly leased by the neighbouring New Bethesda Church, and subsequent developments arising from a court order.

The Commission acknowledges the deep emotions, concerns and sensitivities surrounding this matter, which has attracted considerable attention on social media and generated reactions from Hindu communities across South Africa.

The Commission confirms that a formal complaint has been lodged by the Siva Alayum and that the matter will receive attention through the Commission's established processes and in accordance with its constitutional and legislative mandate.

At this stage, the Commission wishes to emphasise that no findings or conclusions have been reached regarding the merits of the complaint. It would therefore be inappropriate to prejudge the matter or attribute wrongdoing to any of the parties involved.

South Africa is a constitutional democracy founded on the principles of human dignity, equality, freedom of religion and mutual respect. Our Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion. These rights must be exercised within the broader framework of respect for the rights and dignity of others.

The Commission recognises that places of worship, religious structures and sacred spaces carry profound spiritual, cultural and emotional significance for religious communities. Equally, disputes involving property rights, contractual arrangements and judicial processes must be approached with due regard for the rule of law and the rights of all affected parties.

The Commission therefore makes an earnest appeal to all religious communities, community leaders and members of the public to exercise restraint, remain calm and refrain from inflammatory statements, threats, intimidation or actions that could deepen divisions between religious communities.

Of particular concern is the extent to which social media commentary, misinformation, and emotionally charged narratives can amplify tensions, distort public understanding, and threaten the social cohesion and interfaith harmony that have long been hallmarks of South Africa's democratic society.

The Commission reminds all South Africans that religious diversity is one of our nation's greatest strengths. The Hindu and Christian communities, together with other faith traditions, have made invaluable contributions to the social, cultural and spiritual fabric of our country.

It would be deeply regrettable if a dispute involving particular institutions were allowed to develop into broader religious antagonism between communities that have lived, worked and worshipped alongside one another for generations.

Religious differences must never become a source of hatred, hostility or division. Rather, they should inspire dialogue, understanding and respect for our shared humanity.

The Commission encourages all parties to allow the appropriate legal and institutional processes to take their course while remaining open to constructive engagement and peaceful resolution, where appropriate.

The CRL Rights Commission remains committed to promoting religious tolerance, protecting the constitutional rights of all religious communities and strengthening social cohesion.

The Commission will address the complaint within its mandate, guided by the principles of fairness, impartiality, constitutionalism and respect for all parties concerned.

In conclusion, the Commission appeals to the broader South African community not to allow this matter to become a catalyst for religious polarisation.

Our country has overcome far greater divisions through dialogue, understanding and a shared commitment to peaceful coexistence.

Let wisdom prevail over anger, dialogue over confrontation, and unity over division.

Issued by CRL Rights Commission

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