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# Attack on homeless 'classist and stereotypical'

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STRAND sub-council chairperson Chantal Serfontein has come under fire for comments on social media advising people to "ignore" the homeless, who could be part of the 19 000 prisoners recently released.

Although Serfontein said yesterday she was "merely commenting on someone else's Facebook post" about an alleged incident in which a homeless person tried to get into the car of two young women in Strand, her comments have been labelled classist and stereotypical.

"I would like to caution everyone that not all street people who have returned are our regulars. Note that from the 19 000 prisoners released, some of them are on our streets.

"Lock your car, keep your windows closed, and please do not give them anything. They had a choice to leave Strandfontein, and those who did, did so because of their habits. (They don't really want to be helped)."

"Please do not feed those who are begging at our robots, outside our shopping centres, ignore them – they will move back to their homes or to the shelters if they are hungry."

Community Chest chief executive Lorenzo Davids said it was tragic that in a time when the country needed to stand in solidarity there were those seeking to divide fragile communities with "classist thinking and stereotypical utterances".

"We are all defined by how we treat the most vulnerable among us, and in these sentiments expressed I find a rather tragic commentary on those at risk in our society.

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They don't really want to be helped. Please do not feed those who are begging at our robots

Chantal Serfontein

STRAND SUB-COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON

"It's important we don't use a crisis like Covid-19 to perpetuate the class divide so rampant in South Africa. It's messages like these that create the problems we all wish to move away from. It is unhelpful in that it offers no solutions but entrenches fear and deepens the divide between people," Davids said.

Yesterday, Serfontein said people were welcome to donate to NGOs and churches in the area, which would ensure the homeless received a hot meal and warm clothing. "They are becoming a danger to society in terms of their violent behaviour and harassment towards others.

"And, yes, prisoners who have been released are roaming our streets. Where else would they go?" she asked.

The South African Human Rights Commission commissioner Chris Nissen said some of the homeless have been displaced and abused.

"We can't punish every homeless person for a single person's mistake. That is discrimination. As public representatives we must serve the people, irrespective of who they are and where they come from..."