



Dear Friends

You've probably seen news about the fire at Paarl Print in Dal Josafat. It's the biggest loss of life (as far as I know) that our group has ever experienced. So far 11 people have died and others hospitalized with serious injuries. The factory (pre-press, presses, binding & distribution) was destroyed, excluding the labels plant and some admin offices.

For those of you unfamiliar with it: Paarl Print is a factory that prints books 60-70% of the time; commercial work for the rest. Some 280 people work there, of whom about 120 were on duty when the fire struck. The factory also had extensive printed stock on hand.

Stephen van der Walt and his team are in charge at the scene, that still bustles with police, fire brigade, ambulances etc. Press queries are handled by Stephen and Francois Groepe.

The cause of the accident is not yet clear, also why it spread so rapidly. It seems that this fire (unlike the previous one at Montague Gardens a few months ago) did not start on a printing press, but was a factory fire. Several aspects still need clarification.

Steps taken so far include counseling for families who lost members and for the injured, a fund for families who suffered bereavement and for medical costs that may not be covered by insurance, securing the premises tonight, etc. My impression is that Stephen and his extended team are doing an excellent job on a rather turbulent scene. Even now some sections are still burning or smouldering and you can well imagine the agitation of families and colleagues milling around.

The extent of the financial loss has not been established, but we are insured. Rands are a sideshow here: to lose money is a pity, but the loss of life is a tragedy on quite a different scale.

Our thoughts are with the broader families that lost people, with the injured in hospitals and with colleagues who experienced trauma. It's a miserable day in the history of our group.

With kind regards
Koos Bekker