



8 October 2025



GRAPE Media statement

Manna of Our Time:

UBI for the South African Journey Towards Justice and Social Cohesion

Churches are alarmed by rumours to scrap the SRD grant instead of transforming it into a UBI

GRAPE South Africa, part of the Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement (GRAPE) of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, calls on the South African Government to honour its promises by implementing a Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Several political parties have declared their support for a UBI among them the ANC stated in its 2024 Manifesto,: *“We support a phased implementation of a universal and unconditional Basic Income Grant that benefits all individuals without exclusionary means testing or work-seeking conditions.”* During the election campaign, President Cyril Ramaphosa reaffirmed this by pledging: *“We will progressively implement a basic income support grant for unemployed people based on the SRD grant.”*

Despite these commitments, the GNU’s actions point in the opposite direction. Churches are alarmed by restrictive new administrative rules that now affect all SASSA grants. A recent court ruling confirmed that applying such rules to the SRD grant was unjust — yet the same barriers are being extended across the system, excluding people from support for reasons as minor as a once-off remittance. Furthermore, concerning are reports from the Ministry of Finance suggesting the possible scrapping of the SRD grant altogether. Such measures undermine the constitutional obligation to progressively realise social security, and risk plunging millions into deeper poverty while polarising society further and playing into the hand of political forces which cannot be controlled.

We cannot remain silent. These choices will shape the lives of millions of South Africans and the future of the nation. But this road is not inevitable. South Africa can choose a different path — one rooted in economic inclusion and empowerment, capable of beginning to repair our country’s profound inequalities and injustices. Archbishop Thabo Makgoba has rightly said: *“A Universal Basic Income is the yardstick of the new government to achieve tangible results and to improve the lives of many millions of South Africans. A Universal Basic Income is the starting line — a prerequisite which provides a platform to kickstart equitable and sustainable development for all South Africans.”*

The SRD grant has already shown two things: first, the urgent need for income support; and second, the dangers of conditionality. Complex checks exclude many who qualify while creating costly administrative burdens. This is unjust and unsustainable. UBI must therefore be universal and unconditional, ensuring that all South Africans can access it without barriers.

As people of faith, we proclaim UBI as the manna of our time — a sign of God’s justice in today’s wilderness. Just as manna in the desert was freely given so that the people could continue their journey out of slavery, UBI must not depend on proving worthiness or meeting arbitrary conditions.

UBI is not charity. It is justice and empowerment. Families use it for food, electricity, and transport; women use it to strengthen households; young people use it to train, create, and contribute. In every case, UBI stimulates local economies and builds resilience. This is how a nation moves forward together.

We therefore call on government to:

1. Honour their election promises.
2. Reject conditional “job-seekers grants.”
3. Implement a truly universal and unconditional UBI without further delay.

Justice delayed is justice denied. South Africans cannot live on promises — they need bread for the journey.

Further information and resources on the Universal Basic Income in South Africa can be found at www.grape-wcrc.org.

GRAPE is an advocacy programme of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the press statement is endorsed by the following member churches of the GRAPE platform:

Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA)

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)

United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA)

Calvin Protestant Church (CPC) of South Africa

Rhenish Church South Africa (RCSA)

Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches -WPCC

Mpumalanga Council of Churches - MCC

Liberating Lutheran Church of South Africa

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