

MEDIA RELEASE PSA blames GPG for tragedy at Gauteng Health Head Office

DATE 5 September 2018

EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communicatio@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA) has noted with dismay and sadness the serious blaze in the Gauteng Department of Health Head Office in Johannesburg that resulted in an emergency worker falling to his death from the 22nd floor of the building.

The PSA, that represents thousands of members in Gauteng, has over the past number of years been highlighting the poor state of Gauteng Government buildings. As recently as 17 August 2018, the PSA warned the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) that none of the government buildings in the province meets the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations. “The PSA specifically warned that the Gauteng Health Head Office was a hazardous environment. The GPG did not take these warnings seriously, resulting in today’s tragedy. The PSA puts the blame directly on the GPG as it ignored warnings and neglects the maintenance of departmental buildings to a stage of total dilapidation,” said PSA Acting General Manager, Tahir Maepa.

“A PSA official was on the 22nd floor of the building when the evacuation call came. There were no fire marshals to direct or assist people struggling down the stairs. There is no working fire alarm in the building and many people on lower floors did not know about the fire until they were alerted by people fleeing the building,” said Mr Maepa.

The PSA, on many occasions, also brought it to the GPG’s attention that there is no trained health and safety teams in these buildings. “Government has neglected the maintenance of many buildings with dire consequences. The PSA is currently busy with a court application regarding the National Department of Health’s Head Office in the Civitas Building in Pretoria that also does not meet *Occupational Health and Safety Act* requirements. The Ministers of Health and Public Works attended a meeting with the PSA on 15 August 2018 where it was confirmed that Civitas Building should be vacated, and employees be provided with a workplace that is safe and free from health risks. The PSA was surprised yesterday when the National Department of Health gave an ultimatum that employees must work under the same conditions of the unsafe building, instead of resorting to addressing members’ health concerns. It seems the Department is set on ignoring the health and safety of its employees in violation of their constitutional right. In view of today’s tragedy, the PSA demands that the Minister of Health immediately closes both the Gauteng Health Head Office Building and Civitas Building.

“In an effort to protect the lives of employees and other people, the PSA has instructed its attorneys to institute an urgent application to compel the Department to provide a working environment that is not harmful to the Union’s members’ health and wellbeing,” said Mr Maepa.

END

