

MEDIA RELEASE: PSA to approach courts regarding Civitas Building safety
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The Departments of Public Works and National Health are to be served with court papers by the Public Servants Association (PSA) ordering the Department of Health to adhere to recommendations that Civitas Building in Pretoria be vacated, and employees be provided with a workplace that is safe and free from health risks.

The Ministers of Health and Public Works attended a meeting with the PSA on 15 August 2018 whereby it was resolved that Civitas Building is not habitable owing to air quality, lack of ventilation, faulty lightening, dirty carpets and related challenges with the building.

“It was encouraging that the Minister of Health, being a medical doctor himself, stated that the building is a health risk, unsafe and with no windows that can be an alternative instead of air conditioners that have been dysfunctional for months,” said PSA General Manager, Ivan Fredericks.

Parties resolved that both Departments would within 24 hours source alternative accommodation and report back to labour to, amongst others, conclude the process to acquire alternative accommodation and start the relocation process. On 20 August 2018, following no response to the commitment to meet and get an update on the process of acquiring alternative accommodation, the Director-General of Health, called a meeting with unions where she confessed that she had no knowledge of the decisions taken at the meeting on 15 August 2018 with both Ministers. She indicated that all she had was letters from Public Works that indicate a lengthy plan to revamp Civitas Building, which was already rejected on 15 August 2018.

The Minister admitted to unions in a meeting that he has letters and documents from Public Works that purport that Public Works had from March 2018 appointed contractors to fix air-conditioning system and lighting. There was, however, no trace the work being done although the contractors were on site and have since invoiced Public Works and paid for no work done at Civitas Building.

“The PSA expects the Minister of Public Works to open a fraud a case with the SA Police for investigation and prosecution of those involved in blatantly robbing taxpayers’ while endangering the lives of employees of the department of Health. This is a persistent scenario that started in 2010 when the Public Works spent over R1 billion to revamp the very same Civitas Building. The PSA therefore expects the Minister of Public Works to institute an investigation to establish the value for R1 billion spent in 2010. It cannot happen that government spent a vast amount revamping a building, which only a few years later, looks worse than a mine shaft. The building could potentially collapse, and hundreds of employees have pulmonary-related diseases, yet Public Works is only prepared to fix the building over three years. Civitas Building is a disaster of enormous extent waiting to happen. Employers’ disregard for employees’ health and safety will not be tolerated. The PSA is therefore geared to ensure that those responsible and who continue to ignore the call to shut down the Building will personally be held liable and sued for damages and any loss of live associated with the state of the Building,” said Mr Fredericks.

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