

**MEDIA RELEASE:** PSA warns about unsafe Master of High Court building in Johannesburg

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**EMBARGO:** None

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) has warned that the blatant disregard by the Department of Justice of the health and safety of employees stationed at the Master of the High Court in Johannesburg, could have catastrophic consequences.

Occupational Health and Safety inspectors of the Department of Labour have issued eight notices on the Hollard Building at 66 Marshall Street, which has been occupied by the Department for 11 years. Four of the notices are prohibition notices. The building fails to meet requirements on several issues, including locked emergency escape doors and exposed electrical wires. Files that staff members must work with in the filing room are covered in dangerous mold owing to water leakages and dampness. Dangerous gas bottles are stored in the building. Toilets are without water and dirty air conditioners are distributing dangerous air that causes respiratory problems.

“Members working in this building have been exposed to these dangerous working conditions for a while. The problems were reported to the Department of Justice management on several occasions, but nothing was done. When the prohibition notices were issued, the office manager of the Master’s Office instructed staff to continue performing their duties. This is a direct violation of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*,” said PSA Provincial Manager for Gauteng, Mrs Monica Venter.

The PSA has brought this contravention to the attention of the Director-General of the Department of Justice and requested the immediate evacuation of the section of the building and adherence to the prohibition notices. The management of the Master Office ignored the notices and failed to do anything to rectify the condition of the building. “The acting Chief Master denied that the building does not meet requirements and indicated that it is only one toilet that is not working, which does not make the building unsafe. She further, in an email to members, stipulated that the building has been declared safe by the Department. She could, however, not produce the clearance certificates or provide information on the corrections made at the building. Staff members, in the meantime, are forced to perform their duties in these unsafe conditions,” said Mrs Venter.

The PSA pointed out that too many government departments are exposing employees to dangerous working conditions in buildings that are not maintained for years. “This conduct is in stark contravention of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. The PSA will not stop its efforts until all government-occupied buildings are safe and meet the legal requirements,” said Mrs Venter.

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