MEDIA RELEASE	**Unsafe working conditions at Bela-Bela Magistrates Court: PSA calls on Minister of Justice to intervene**
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is shocked by the state of the Bela-Bela Magistrates Court, which poses threatens the safety and health of employees and members of the public.

During a recent visit to the Court by the PSA in response to an alert by the Union's members, it was found that employees are subjected to extremely poor working conditions. The Court is housed in an old, dilapidated, and neglected building with asbestos roofing. There is only one working toilet for the public and males and females are forced to use the same toilet. Fire extinguishers were last serviced in June 2021, which is a disaster waiting to happen in case of a fire. Air conditioners are not working, particularly in the mobile office that is extremely hot owing to sun exposure. Various windows are dysfunctional, resulting in poor ventilation. Roofs are leaking and walls are cracked. Gutters are rusty and unkept and paint is peeling in some offices.

The employer attributes this non-compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safey Act (OHSA)* to the Department of Public Works as it is responsible for infrastructure development and maintenance. The building was earmarked for renovations in 2012 already but this failed to materialise, as with many other government projects. The Department of Justice seems to have given up and has accepted the situation at Bela-Bela Magistrate Court to the detriment of employees and the community. The service level agreement between the two departments is not assisting as there is a blame game whilst the situation at the buildings continues to deteriorate.

It is further regrettable that a backlog and understaffing at the Department of Employment and Labour allow many departments, including the Department of Justice, to get away with shocking *OHSA* non-compliance. Inspection of buildings are delayed by months or even years after being reported by the PSA. The failure to maintain government and rented buildings is a major and growing problem as many employees are working in unsafe buildings.

The PSA urges the Minister of Justice to urgently intervene to prevent a tragedy at Bela-Bela Magistrates Court. The Department of Justice, as employer, has a legal obligation to provide a workplace that is safe and without risk to its employees. The Department cannot use the relationship with the Department of Public Works as an excuse as its employees have a constitutional right to a safe workplace.

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