OCCUPANTS OF COLLAPSED BUILDING HAD BEEN WAITING FOR EMERGENCY HOUSING FOR 8 MONTHS

The families living in an abandoned building at 39 to 41 Davies Street, which partially collapsed today, killing three children, had been asking the City of Johannesburg for emergency accommodation for eight months. But none was provided.

The Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) represents the residents of 39 to 41 Davies Street, in which three children were tragically killed when a wall collapsed on them this afternoon. The residents have been aware that the building is unsafe for some time. Since mid-2017, SERI has been pressing the City of Johannesburg to provide the residents with emergency accommodation, which would have allowed them to move out of the dangerous building to safer accommodation elsewhere.

In July 2017, City officials produced a report for Mayor Herman Mashaba strongly recommending that the residents be provided with alternative accommodation. The City did an audit of the residents in August 2017. Yet, for 8 months thereafter, the City has taken no steps to provide the residents with a safe alternative. The residents were left in unsafe accommodation as a result.

The residents are just 300 of an estimated 100 000 people living in abandoned properties in the inner-city of Johannesburg, many in unsafe conditions. The occupiers of these properties are forced to live in abandoned buildings because they cannot afford to rent or buy housing on the private market, and the City has failed to provide affordable rental housing or shelter accommodation for them.

The City has a constitutional duty to provide the residents of 39 to 41 Davies Street, and people like them, with affordable, safe alternative accommodation, but has consistently failed to do so. The City’s plans are to provide a mere 364 new beds in temporary accommodation this year. That is a tiny fraction of what is required to cater for poor people living in Johannesburg’s abandoned buildings.

Nomzamo Zondo, SERI’s director of litigation, said “The City must do better. It is not acceptable that there is literally no accommodation available for people, such as the residents, who are living in profoundly unsafe conditions. Tragedies like today’s wall collapse could be avoided if the City allocated more resources to basic, safe and decent accommodation to very poor people, such as the residents of Davies Street, as it is legally required to do”.

SERI calls on the City to immediately re-accommodate the residents of 39 to 41 Davies Street in safe, decent and affordable accommodation.

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