PRESS STATEMENT
11 April 2018

CORRECTING FALSE STATEMENTS
BY HERMAN MASHABA

The Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) is aware of the statements made by Herman Mashaba and Tony Turison, of the City of Johannesburg, to the effect that SERI has “obstructed” its efforts to address the needs of occupiers of bad buildings, by refusing to make our staff available to assist it in surveying the occupants of those buildings.

These allegations are false. In the case of the building at 39 to 41 Davies Street, Johannesburg, which partially collapsed this week, the City did, in fact, conduct an audit of the occupiers and their personal circumstances. In July 2017, the City also compiled a report for Mayor Mashaba recommending that the residents of the building be found alternative accommodation. But nothing was done.

In the cases of all other buildings in which SERI has clients, it is, in fact, SERI that first draws the City’s attention to the needs and identities of the occupiers of unsafe buildings.

In response to proceedings brought to evict the residents, SERI compiles a list of the occupiers and sets out their needs and circumstances in affidavits that are then provided to the City. The City is then asked to provide alternative accommodation. Where the City requires another registration process (as it sometimes does), we ensure that our clients attend that process.

Once these registration processes are complete, our clients wait for alternative accommodation. Most of our clients, like the residents of 29 to 31 Davies Street, have been waiting for the City to provide that accommodation for many months, often many years.

There is not a single instance in which the City has actually provided alternative accommodation, unless SERI or another public interest NGO, has gone to court to force the City to make the accommodation available. Approximately 1000 residents of unsafe buildings have been rehoused in this way since 2008.

The truth is that the City never acts on its own. It is SERI, and other organisations like the Legal Resources Centre, Lawyers for Human Rights and the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, that have obtained court orders that have forced the City to act to provide residents of unsafe buildings with the accommodation they so desperately need.

Far from obstructing the City, “so-called” human rights lawyers, and our clients, are the only reason the City ever does anything for poor people living in unsafe buildings in Johannesburg’s inner city.