

MEDIA RELEASE PSA alarmed by unsafe working conditions at Bloemfontein Government Mortuary

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about deteriorating working conditions and failure by the Free State Department of Health to comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)* at the Government Mortuary in Bloemfontein in the Free State.

Critical issues include unhygienic conditions, malfunctioning fridges, and blocked drains that caused body fluids and blood to leak into the basement of the building, causing a foul odour. This is creating a severe health hazard. Several drains and dissecting tables are obstructed, preventing proper cleaning, and worsening unsanitary conditions. Showers used by employees for hygiene after dissections are non-operational, compromising their ability to maintain basic cleanliness. Malfunctioning ventilation and autopsy rooms lacking proper ventilation, with no windows for fresh air circulation, make the work environment unbearable. In addition, the infrastructure is unsafe. This includes a door used for unloading bodies recently collapsing and underscoring the need for urgent maintenance. Despite employees' requests for counselling to manage the emotional toll of their work, the Department has not arranged any debriefing sessions. This is in violation of a collective bargaining agreement. The failure to provide such sessions has had a detrimental impact on employees' mental health.

The Department's failure to respond to employees' repeated efforts to raise pressing matters, has left employees exposed to significant health, safety, and emotional risks. The PSA has written to the MEC for Health, requesting his urgent intervention in this matter. The Department's response has, however, been disappointing. Budget constraints are cited, rather than addressing the serious hazards employees are facing. The PSA has also reported the matter to the Department of Employment and Labour, requesting an urgent health and safety inspection to ensure that the Department meets its obligations under the *OHSA*.

The PSA initially raised these concerns with the Head of Department (HOD) for urgent attention. The response was inadequate, citing budget constraints as an excuse without providing any solutions to mitigate the risks. The HOD's response also failed to acknowledge the emotional toll on employees caused by the absence of counselling support, in contravention of the collective agreement.

The PSA urges the MEC for Health to take immediate action to address these critical safety and health issues and ensure compliance with the *OHSA*. The PSA is committed to protecting the rights and well-being of employees and will continue to engage with the relevant authorities until this matter has been resolved.

END

