

MEDIA RELEASE PSA concerned about unsafe conditions at Umnotho House housing Gauteng Department Economic Development and Agriculture

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about reports of dangerous incidents at Umnotho House, which houses the Gauteng Department of Economic Development and Agriculture.

On 18 October 2024, passerby observed smoke coming from the top of the building and the building's management and security were informed. On 19 October 2024, water leaking from the ceiling caused the collapse of the reception area ceiling. This building has faced ongoing occupational health and safety issues for years, which have significantly worsened in recent months. As a result, Johannesburg Emergency Services previously closed the building and instructed management to address various hazards before allowing employees to return.

Despite these concerns, the Department's management, supported by a report, allegedly declared the building safe and ordered employees to return to work. Employees had no choice but to comply, which has now led to these alarming incidents, involving smoke and water damage. The PSA rejected this report, pointing out that it was not conducted by a recognised authority with the expertise to declare the building safe.

The PSA is shocked by the dismissive attitude of management during a meeting on 21 October 2024, where it downplayed these incidents. Following the PSA's insistence, employees have now been partially allowed to work from home, pending an investigation into the two recent incidents. The PSA has further demanded that an independent expert with the necessary qualifications be appointed to conduct a thorough investigation into the building's safety. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for 22 October 2024, where preliminary findings and a way forward for employees working in the building will be discussed.

The PSA will take all steps possible to ensure that the health and safety of employees working in government buildings are safeguarded.

END

