

MEDIA RELEASE

PSA urges Minister to intervene in Department of Defence relocation of employees to unsafe building

DATE

14 February 2025

EMBARGO

None

ENQUIRIES

communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about the Department of Defence's (DOD) decision to relocate Infantry and Army Support Formations to Besters Building, which was severely damaged by fire in 2013.

The building at 981 Dequar Road in Pretoria was declared unsafe for human habitation following the fire. Employees were subsequently relocated to the Peter Bothongo Building, where they have been operating since. Alarmingly, nearly eleven years later, the Besters Building has not been renovated or repaired, yet employees are being instructed to move back to the building.

During a visit, the PSA observed that employees at Peter Bothongo Building had already packed their belongings, following instructions to relocate. An inspection *in-loco* at Besters Building revealed shocking conditions, Sections of the building remain unrenovated since the fire. Employees were seen cleaning offices in areas without electricity. Exposed wiring was visible, lifts were non-functional, and the premises still reeked of smoke. Parts of the building were in a state of severe vandalism. The DOD Safety Inspection Report, dated 27 January 2025, furthermore confirmed that Besters Building is not compliant with occupational health and safety (OHS) standards.

In the interest of ensuring a safe working environment, the PSA urgently requested a Departmental Bargaining Chamber meeting, through the Secretariat, to take place between 10 and 14 February 2025 to discuss the matter and to halt the unsafe relocation. The DOD, however, merely indicated that it is conducting an internal investigation, whilst the relocation of employees is already in progress. The DOD has also failed to commit to engaging with the PSA at the special Bargaining Chamber meeting, as requested.

The DOD's insistence on relocating employees despite its own OHS report deeming the building unsafe, raises serious concerns about its commitment to employee welfare. This situation echoes the tragic loss of South African soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, allegedly owing to inadequate resources and preparedness. The PSA will not stand by whilst the DOD exposes its workforce to hazardous working conditions.

The PSA possesses both the relocation instruction and the OHS report, confirming the non-compliance. The PSA urges the Minister of Defence to urgently intervene and suspend the relocation of Infantry and Army Support Formations to the unsafe Besters Building. Should the DOD fail to comply, the PSA will explore all available legal and industrial avenues to protect employees.

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