



CITY OF CAPE TOWN

STATEMENT BY THE CITY'S EXECUTIVE MAYOR, ALDERMAN DAN PLATO

Housing of refugees/non-nationals who occupied the Methodist Church and surrounding City streets

Following the announcement by President Cyril Ramaphosa that our country would be placed under lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Cape Town began putting in place a number of emergency measures in order to comply with the National State of Disaster and the associated regulations published by National Government. Among these steps was to urgently find emergency accommodation for the homeless and refugees living on the streets of Cape Town, as well as those within the Methodist Church who were well in excess of 100.

As Mayor, I conducted a number of site visits to determine the feasibility of various sites around the city, taking into account the need for social distancing. I was accompanied by the National Minister of Public Works, Patricia de Lille on one of these site visits where various options were identified for this purpose. Our officials also had numerous engagements with the representatives of the Minister of Home Affairs, the Western Cape Premier's office, Department of Social Development and the South African Police Service (SAPS) in order to find solutions as quickly as possible.

The Wingfield site was identified by Minister De Lille as being owned by her Department, (despite challenges to this assertion being received from the Ndabeni Trust) and she instructed that it be used by the City for the housing of the non-nationals in our City. We immediately took occupation of that site for the purposes of preparing it for the erection of tents and basic services for this purpose, and we are doing so in a manner that ensures applicable social distancing for the duration of the National Disaster.

We also jointly identified the Paint City site in Bellville to house the City's homeless population and a tent was sourced by Minister De Lille's office for this purpose.

Unfortunately, for reasons that are still unknown to me, the removal of the refugees from the church at Green Market Square on Thursday carried out by SAPS, was premature and did not conform to our agreement in this regard. The Wingfield site was not yet ready for occupation and the church refugees were moved to the Paint City site by SAPS without the City's agreement, while that site was also not yet ready.

The result is that the accommodation of over 500 persons currently at that site is not compliant with the applicable COVID-19 regulations and this may well result in a further relocation being required in due course. The City of Cape Town has in the meantime continued preparing the temporary emergency accommodation at Wingfield in order to house those refugees who still require evacuation from the streets surrounding the City centre, where they have been resident since they were evicted from the Church after a factional dispute.

We have procured tents, water tankers, ablution facilities, and health and safety supplies and equipment to ensure that the Wingfield site is compliant with the regulations now in force. The refugees will be moved onto the site shortly.

It is also important to note, that while the City did not support the removal of the church refugees to the Paint City site as it was contrary to prior agreements reached with the National Government, the fact is that the removal has taken place and any resultant overcrowding and/or health risks that are triggered at that site will need to be dealt with by all three tiers of government on a co-operative basis going forward.

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