



**At least 200 workers of the Department of Health refused to enter the building last week, saying it was dilapidated.**

PICTURE: BONGANI SHILUBANE/AFRICAN NEWS AGENCY (ANA)

# Health workers coaxed back to work

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HEALTH Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi has successfully encouraged striking staff at his Pretoria office to return to work.

They had downed tools and staged sit-ins last week protesting against what they described as the unhealthy state of the department's headquarters.

At least 200 workers refused to work inside the building on Thabo Sehume Street, saying it was dilapidated and in need of urgent renovation. They refused to go past the

reception and security checkpoint area. However, they went inside yesterday morning after Motsoaledi spoke to them.

He urged them to reconsider their action, assuring them that areas that needed urgent repairs would be attended to by engineers and experts soon.

On Thursday, management had agreed with the unions that two other buildings identified by the Department of Public Works as alternatives were in worse conditions.

Department spokesperson Popo Maja said management acknow-

ledged that the building had dysfunctional elevators, air-conditioners, alarms and fire extinguishers, and housed rats and cockroaches. He said these problems would be dealt with.

"The minister emphasised that the building was not going to collapse. This building is in fact very solid, according to engineers. The minister reports to work in this building and he would like to see all his staff doing the same," said Maja.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) and Public Servants Association, which led the strike, heeded the

minister's advice to resume work while repairs started.

Nehawu shop steward Bhungani Mzolo said it was agreed that the workers would return to work and allow engineers and experts to repair everything that required attention.

"A damning report showed that the building was only 20% compliant with the requirements of a working environment, and that's why we were on strike. We want assurance that the department would work with a checklist to meet the criteria for full compliance."

The department has at least 1 200 workers.