

EDITORIALS

Duty of the govt to keep people safe

It is a sad day indeed when a group representing civil servants has to take the government to court to ensure their members' safety.

That is what is happening next week when the Public Service Association (PSA) will head to the Labour Court in an attempt to close down the Civitas building in the Pretoria city centre, which it describes as a death trap and a much worse disaster waiting to happen than the deadly fire at the health department's building in Johannesburg this week.

Civitas, as we report today, is a pigsty, where the neglect of basic maintenance and security is putting the lives of workers at risk.

The irony is that the building is the headquarters of Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi.

Although it is not his responsibility to maintain government buildings – that falls to the public works department (the people who built Nkandla) – we find it incredible that he has not at least pressured his comrades in that department into rectifying what is much more than a very sick building. It is a threat to the health and lives of the people working there.

A number of workers have already embarked on an illegal strike to make their point about the dangerous conditions.

The fire in the building occupied by the Gauteng departments of health and human settlements in Johannesburg cost the lives of three firefighters – and occurred despite the fact that assessments had shown it did not meet health and safety standards.

Nothing was done. People died.

There are many other government buildings in a similar, or worse, state all over the country. And yet nothing seems to get done.

The government has a legal and moral obligation to ensure that the people who work for it are not exposed to danger or discomfort.

It is time they began honouring that obligation.

Use overseas pros for Steinhoff

Even by South Africans' high standards in ducking, diving and avoiding responsibility, the performance by former Steinhoff CEO Markus Jooste before parliament this week was breathtaking in its avoidance of accountability.

After his long and rambling testimony to the lawmakers, there can be few people who would have had any clearer inkling of what happened to the massive multinational company which caused its precipitous drop in value.

Partly the dust of confusion was because the parliamentarians asking the questions were also floundering around in a morass of ignorance. That's not their fault, it must be said, because the intricacies of international finance require specialised knowledge.

So, we think it is a good suggestion from Institute for Security Studies' CEO Jakkie Cilliers that we ask foreign governments to loan us people with the necessary expertise to help in the investigations into this sort of white-collar business disaster.

So far, there has been no one held accountable – much less arrested and charged – for the Steinhoff debacle, which underlines the importance of the suggestion by Cilliers.

He says investigative capacity in government agencies like The Hawks has been decimated. We need all the help we can get – so why not ask for it overseas?