

■ CIVITAS WOES

# Focus on fixing Health building – unions

JAMES MAHLOKWANE

james.mahlokwane@inl.co.za

*Drop public sympathy campaign and get to work, ministers told*

TRADE unions have called on Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi and his Public Works counterpart Thulas Nxesi to stop seeking public sympathy and fix the dilapidated Civitas, the home of the Department of Health.

On Friday, the ministers told journalists that the poorly maintained building had experienced two arson attempts and several acts of sabotage in the past week.

Public Servants Association deputy general manager Tahir Maep yesterday said their members only found out about the allegations of arson and sabo-

tage when the ministers sent out media invites to the briefing.

He said they had conveniently sought to announce these troubles just when the government was under fire for failing to maintain its buildings.

Maepa said Motsoaledi and Nxesi should focus on improving the building's health and safety standards.

"We spoke to our members and we have not seen any evidence of arson. The building's cameras are not working, but the ministers are saying people who did these things were turning cameras the other way. Why would anyone

turn a camera that is not working?

"They are also saying there was cutting of wires, but from our knowledge that building is as good as ashes. We are saying they must allow the media to go inside and see the alleged damage if they have nothing to hide.

"I must also say that we welcome police investigations because we know they will expose that the building's cameras and biometric system do not work. This is despite the more than R1 billion of public funds used to renovate the building a couple of years ago."

He said the minister should have

held the media briefing in the Civitas building instead of another government building in Hatfield, to prove that the building was as safe as they claimed.

The association's general manager, Ivan Fredericks, said unions stood by members who were no longer willing to put their lives in danger or compromise their health by entering the building.

"We welcome whatever investigation the two departments wish to do to get to the bottom of the incident that occurred at Civitas building on September 6, but will not allow the departments to use that incident to

deflect attention from the major health and safety challenges the building and other government buildings have been presenting for years," said Fredericks.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union also welcomed investigations, but announced that it stood by its decision to not allow its members to enter the building.

The association opposed a high court interdict by the Health Department last Thursday to force the protesting workers not to intimidate those who wanted to work.

The matter was referred to the Labour Court, and will be heard on Friday.