

EDITORIALS

Tackle sick health before new NHI

SA's national department of health is seriously sick when workers refuse to go to their offices because, they claim, the building is in such a bad state of disrepair it endangers their lives.

Yet, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi claims the safety issues at the Civitas building in Pretoria have been exaggerated. He says he and his senior managers report to work every day – his office is on the 28th floor – and that while there are “problems” with the building these “can be corrected”.

That may be so, minister, but we believe your people have a point. Civitas has been rated as only 20% compliant with the stipulations of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. That is even lower than the score of the Bank of Lisbon building in Johannesburg – which houses provincial government departments. And that latter building caught fire earlier this month, causing the deaths of three firefighters.

While the habitability of the building is the responsibility of the department of public works (which appears to be sleeping on the job), Motsoaledi has been aware of this problem for months and cannot try – as he has done – to blame dissatisfaction among workers on unionist agitation and intimidation.

In the meantime, the work at the national department of health has been seriously compromised. Permits are not being granted for anything – from drugs to new clinics. In the end, it is ordinary South Africans who are suffering.

But what is most worrying about this, is that this is the place from where Motsoaledi and his bureaucrats are planning to implement the National Health Insurance (NHI) project, which has attracted widespread criticism from the private health sector.

If the minister is incapable of promoting good health for his own workers, what chance do the rest of us have?

UN's Caster stand full circle for SA

Back in the apartheid era, when South African sports grabbed the attention of the United Nations (UN), there were most likely to be condemnations rather than commendations.

So it is interesting to see how the wheel well and truly turned this week when independent experts, representing various sub-committees and working groups within the UN, jointly wrote a letter to the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) which, effectively, supports South African athlete Caster Semenya.

The letter called on the IAAF to reconsider its new regulations – which are due to come into force in November – which would force women with hyperandrogenism to reduce their testosterone levels before they would be allowed to compete internationally.

The UN experts said there were “methodological flaws” in the IAAF research into the subject and that the regulations would violate many UN basic human rights guarantees. Among these are non-discrimination, the right to bodily integrity as well as protection from “degrading and harmful practices”.

We agree with the experts that from all angles – physiological, emotional, ethical and legal – Semenya has been abused by the international athletics system ... simply because she is too good for the rest of the world. Whatever else you call it, we call it unfair.