

Break down the walls housing these syndicates

On Thursday we reported how an alleged syndicate said to be run by five men hijacked more than 100 government buildings in Mthatha. This is absolutely shocking and mind-boggling as law-enforcement agencies are yet to crack down on them.

The gang is believed to also be behind the illegal sale of government land, while also collecting “rent” from tenants.

This emerged at a meeting where senior politicians, provincial police bosses and government officials met with irate civil society, traditional and religious leaders on Wednesday.

As a result, a task team including Civil Society Forum members, ECDC officials, public works, finance, rural development, safety and liaison and Walter Sisulu University was established to develop a response plan to the crisis.

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The hijacking of government buildings is a nationwide problem where thugs normally take advantage of rundown or poorly maintained buildings.

Such buildings are often turned into drug dens and brothels, where tenants’ lives are put in danger on a daily basis by the squalid state of the buildings.

In places like Johannesburg, the Red Ants, a private security company that specialises in clearing “illegal invaders” from properties, have over the years been hard at work taking back hijacked buildings in the CBD.

This is yet to happen in Mthatha where the alleged mafia has had free rein, hijacking buildings, one by one. This is simply unacceptable as SA is a country with laws and not a banana republic.

But no matter how late the move came, the establishment of the task team means something is finally being done and will hopefully result in the thugs being flushed out and government reclaiming its properties. This should be non-negotiable with the hijackers facing the full might of the law.

In an ideal world, it should not be very difficult to take back the buildings as there should be records of who rents which building and when they last paid.

And should it be discovered that government officials work with the alleged syndicate, heads must roll.