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Threat to Atlantis economic zone

Lack of skills could pose a stumbling block

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THE SPECIAL Economic Zone (SEZ) in Atlantis could end up a failure if government departments can't find a solution to the social ills that are plaguing the community.

Economic Development Minister Ebrahim Patel raised his concerns following a visit to the area yesterday.

At the notorious Dura Flats, Patel saw first-hand how residents lived in the rundown buildings.

Patel said: "For the enormous millions of millions of rand of tax benefits that the SEZ will bring we need an educated workforce, it needs people living in decent conditions and we won't realise the promise of jobs if the problems of Atlantis are not solved.

"I'm very concerned at the lack of sufficient attention to development. If we don't get local skills, it means the SEZ can't take off or we need to import skills from outside, which would lead to resentment from local communities.

"What we want to do is to bring some changes to the lives of people of Atlantis in preparation for the SEZ."

Patel also heard from residents held hostage by the on-going violence between the 28s and the Horribles gangs which have combined to wage a deadly war with the Terribles and the American gangs.

Community worker Beverley Kleinsmith, along with ward councillor Fiona Abrahams and other stakeholders, showed the minister the ruins of what used to be a drug rehab centre.

President Cyril Ramaphosa

launched the SEZ last December 6 and the launch of the 124.5 hectare area was designated for the establishment of a green technology hub in the Western Cape.

A combined R1.8bn is expected to be invested in the SEZ by 2022, with the creation of 1 200 direct jobs.

Patel's next stop was Witsand, where he was introduced to several children who are at home because they could not be accommodated at local schools. SA National Civics Organisation activist Luvuyo Matshisi explained to Patel that residents have been battling for more than 10 years to have a school built in the area.

According to Matshisi, the community had meetings with the Western Cape Education Department about the possibility of building a school. Matshisi said pupils in the area had to get up at 4am to get a bus and travel 17km to Meulenhof Primary School in Philadelphia.

"It is absolutely essential that we build a school in Witsand. If we don't get kids into school, don't get them from primary school to high school to technical college, we are not going to have the skills to sustain the SEZ.

"We have seen two Cape Towns, the beautiful country of the Waterfront and the painful Cape Town of Witsand

and Atlantis. Cape Town needs to wake up and realise these are its children, its people and we can't have a beautiful Cape Town for the tourist and a painful Cape Town for citizens. More has to be done by the province and the City.

"The national importance is that the government is going to have these SEZs in different parts of the country and if we don't have strong co-operation and a big focus by local government to provide skills we have to turn these zones into areas of resentment and anger resulting in tyres burning," Patel said.

To page 2