



Publication: Weekend Argus (Saturday) - Main

Title: Construction mafia's toll on Province and victims

Publish date: 02 Sep 2023

Page: 4

Reach: 33996

AVE:R 11816.31

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MURDER

Construction mafia's toll on Province and victims

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SEVEN months after his wife, City official Wendy Kloppers, was murdered at a construction site, Raelton Kloppers has opened up about their loss, grief and dangers surrounding the case.

The Kloppers family is one of many who have become victims of the "construction mafia" and extortion in the Western Cape.

There are eight ongoing investigations into extortion on sites in Manenberg, Delft, Milnerton and Gugulethu.

The Provincial Department of Infrastructure's Human Settlements has spent more than R161.7 million on security to stop the extortion.

According to the department, these cases are centred on unlawful material supply, site security breaches, demolitions and acts of intimidation.

Raelton is now a single father to their two sons, aged 17 and 11.

"The police told me it was the most popular reason Wendy was killed in a case of mistaken identity," he said. "The person who is involved or has a contract at that site, his wife, looks like Wendy, and they drive the exact same car, and it is the same colour."

Wendy, an air quality manager for the City, was shot and killed in February while on a site in Delft. A week prior to the shooting, three construction workers were shot and wounded.

The City offered a R1m reward for information which would lead to an arrest, but have no suspects yet.

"She was very safety conscious. She was an air quality manager; when a company had a problem, or a neighbourhood, she would go out and see how she can resolve it," he said.

"On the day of the incident, they had a site meeting, but her colleagues, who were also supposed to attend the meeting, were at the wrong entrance of the site, which was the back.

"When they realised they were at the wrong entrance and went to the front, the security stopped them and said there had been a shooting, and little did they know it was their manager."

Raelton said while they appreciated the posting of a reward, it was a known fact the site was a danger zone.

He said his sons are the ones most affected.

"My older son is in matric, and his matric ball is in September, and she will not be here.

"And my youngest, who is 11, he had a birthday in April."

A construction worker at the Manenberg site, where the School of Skills was being built at the cost of R84 million, has spoken of the intimidation they suffered.

"They (gangsters) would come onto the site and ask who was in charge, and they would come with firearms to the meetings," said the worker.

"We were only at the site for a month, and we did not go back."

Another worker, who was at the site where Rosendal Junior College was built, said there was no communication with the community or stakeholders when tenders were signed.

A year ago, the Western Cape Education Department revealed that the work at the Manenberg School of Skills was interrupted due to the "construction mafia", although it had been scheduled to take 87 weeks to complete.

Mayco member for Human Settlements, Carl Poppheim, said the City was launching an anti-extortion campaign in an effort to increase the reporting of incidents.

"Call it protection money, blackmail or extortion, threats and intimidation. Our project teams, contractors, staff and communities are enduring the most of this horrible criminal practice," he added.

"The City deploys additional security and law enforcement and has some contingencies in place."

Thamsanqa Mchunu, the media liaison officer of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, said: "Government is seized with the issue of construction mafia and is moving to deal with this threat and acts of economic sabotage as clearly articulated by the Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Mr Sihle Zikalala, MP."

