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PLANS TO RECLAIM GOVT BUILDINGS

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Efforts are under way to reclaim government buildings that have been illegally occupied, and there are also plans to renovate and rehabilitate deteriorated structures, according to Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) Minister Sihle Zikalala.

He said these projects, which will be under "operation bring back", will require partnerships with the private sector.

Zikalala was speaking at the property sector conference held at the Olive Convention Centre in Durban yesterday.

He stressed how government was highly dependent on leases from the private sector, which was why both sectors needed to work hand-in-hand to renovate and recover investment from dilapidated buildings.

"Moving forward we will spend on maintenance so that our buildings don't lose value and we will not only focus on buildings but on land parcels too." The minister said the department will be working with many stakeholders, including the National Prosecuting Authority's asset forfeiture unit, to recover some of the properties. "We want to also partner with municipalities to ensure that their set by-laws make it easier to identify such buildings that have been occupied illegally sooner," he said.

Zikalala said hiring security to guard the buildings was costly and government was looking at caretaker-ship options, where people could offer to occupy the spaces at a low lease rate. He said this option will also ensure the upkeep of government buildings, preventing them from decaying.

Aspiring property developer, Pam Taylor, from Cato Manor, who attended the conference, said that she was part of a group of women who have a dream of acquiring abandoned buildings for the purpose of renovating them for student accommodation.

Taylor said after hearing from other property experts, she realised that she and her small group have been knocking on the wrong doors which is why they have not been able to acquire even one property since 2020.

"As Property Solutions, we wanted to do something for ourselves as women. Since we started, we struggled without knowing where to go or who we need to speak to."

"From this morning, I have been getting further information on how we can get abandoned buildings as we have learned that the government needs people like us to assist with this crisis," she said.