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TAKING STOCK

# MEC inspects Durban's problem buildings



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THE visit by the KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Public Works and Human Settlements to some of the dilapidated buildings belonging to the department that are in Durban has laid bare the horrid living conditions in them.

The *Mercury* accompanied MEC Siphso "KK" Nkosi when he visited five buildings that are owned by the department yesterday. Among the buildings visited were the Seamen's Institute building, Westpoint, the Palm Beach Hotel, the Esplanade building, and the Castle building near the Mayville area. Three of these buildings were unoccupied and sealed off by the department with guards manning the entrances, but the Seamen's Institute building and Westpoint were found to be illegally occupied.

Nkosi visited the buildings following a devastating fire in a hijacked Johannesburg building that left more than 70 people dead.

That disaster has triggered quick

reactions from government officials at different levels who want to tackle problem buildings as they fear the potential for a similar disaster.

In the Seamen's Institute building in Mahatma Gandhi (Point) Road, the situation was dire.

"We are just happy to have a roof over our heads," said one of the residents. She lives in one room that she shares with her two adult children, one 19 and the other 22.

The room is small for a family of three adults, with the door opening almost onto the bed. There is a makeshift kitchen and lounge where there is a TV perched on top of the fridge.

"We moved in here 16 years ago. At the time we were paying rent of about R1 500 per month, but we are not paying anything now," she said.

She said the living situation was terrible and they would welcome the opportunity to be moved to better accommodation.

"When it rains, the whole building gets flooded because there is no roof here," she said, pointing to a gaping



THE Seamen's Institute building in Mahatma Gandhi (Point) Road is in a dilapidated state but there are people staying in the building.  
| DOCTOR NGCOBO African News Agency (ANA)

hole in the roof in front of her door.

The building inside is crumbling, parts of the walls seem to have broken off with the bricks falling off the walls. What used to be the main toilets of the building are broken, filthy and do not seem to be in use any more. The main courtyard of the building is used as a drying yard for residents' washing.

While there are rooms that seem to be occupied, there are many other rooms that have broken doors and look filthy, with piles of rubbish inside. They don't seem to have been used by

anyone in a long time.

The building appears to have electricity and there are several satellite dishes that hang on the inner walls.

In the Esplanade building, Nkosi conceded that the department had been slow to act, and while invaders were removed they had caused damage inside the building and removed windows.

Nkosi told *The Mercury* that he was shocked by the conditions he had witnessed, adding that one of the things that he needed to establish was

whether any of the people had applied for government housing or if they were jumping the queue, and based on that finding, the department would identify a path to assist those people.

Nkosi said although the department had yet to finalise the way forward on the five buildings, there were two possible options that were being considered, including the disposal of the buildings, either through sales or carrying out renovations and leasing them out to individuals from historically disadvantaged groups.