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# Efforts to remove occupiers

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**A** group of people occupying the land outside the Cape Castle of Good Hope might soon be removed as the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) vows to engage and work with the city to resolve the illegal occupancy of the group.

A month ago, Cape Town mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis wrote a letter to Sihle Zikalala, Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, urging him to intervene in removing the dozens of people living closer to the Castle for the past few years.

In his letter, Hill-Lewis said the City was willing to partner with the department. He warned that if Zikalala did not respond by Friday 16 June the City would go to court to seek an eviction order (“City ready to act if DPWI does intervene to remove the group of people occupying site outside Castle”, *People’s Post*, 13 June 2023).

Responding to *People’s Post* queries on whether the municipality would indeed seek an eviction order after the set deadline passed, the City says: “Following the City’s initial correspondence to DPWI, mayor Hill-Lewis further wrote to the minister again on (Wednesday) 21 June inviting him to meet to discuss how the City can best assist in getting this issue resolved in a reasonable and just manner.

“On Monday 3 July, the City received a written commitment from DPW that they will respond to the offer of support to resolve the unlawful occupation and the mayor’s request for a meeting.”

In a media statement, Zikalala says his department “exists to solve the people’s problems”

“We will be meeting with the City and stakeholders to understand this challenge better. We have been meeting mayors and stakeholders in the Western Cape and all other provinces. We will not seek to undermine the



spirit of intergovernmental relations.

“We will engage the mayor through established intergovernmental channels. We are always conscious of not engaging in overzealous postures that may turn out to be reckless and may in the end exacerbate challenges instead of solving them.”

Zikalala says as a department they have their Operation Bring Back (OBB) which is an initiative to reclaim all stolen or illegally occupied properties including those not paying rentals. “We believe that when we engage as government, we will look at the land within the city and engage with other relevant departments and institutions to solve the people’s problems and eventually address the Cape of Good Hope challenges. We are one government and we can’t fail to meet and resolve issues.”

According to the City, its social development officials have visited the site on at least three occasions to date and in an effort to offer a suite of social assistance to those unlawfully occupying the Castle precinct, which included a safe space or shelter accommodation. These offers have been consistently refused, but the offer remains.

The City says: “No person has the right to indefinitely refuse offers of social assistance to get off the streets while exclusively reserving a public place. Accepting help to leave the streets is the best choice for safety, dignity and well-being”.

**A group of people has been occupying the castle precinct for the past few years.**

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