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'Abused' teen left in lurch

DISABLED: DEPT REFUSES TO TAKE IN GIRL WHO WAS ALLEGEDLY RAPED MANY TIMES

➔ **'Officials turned her away, saying there's no space for her in place of safety.'**

Getrude Makhafola

The plight of the family of a disabled 13-year-old girl who was allegedly raped multiple times by men in Katlehong has fallen on deaf ears, with the Gauteng government refusing to take her to a place of safety despite an urgent court request to do so.

The teenager lives with her grandparents in the Ekurhuleni township.

Officials last week turned away Katlehong activists, telling them they could not take the girl in because there was no place for her.

But according to the department of public works, the Gauteng government was in 2019 given five houses to accommodate victims of rape and gender-based violence, but the properties remain empty, costing taxpayers R12 million so far in security costs.

Local activists said the teenager's disability rendered her vulnerable to predators and she urgently needed a place of safety.

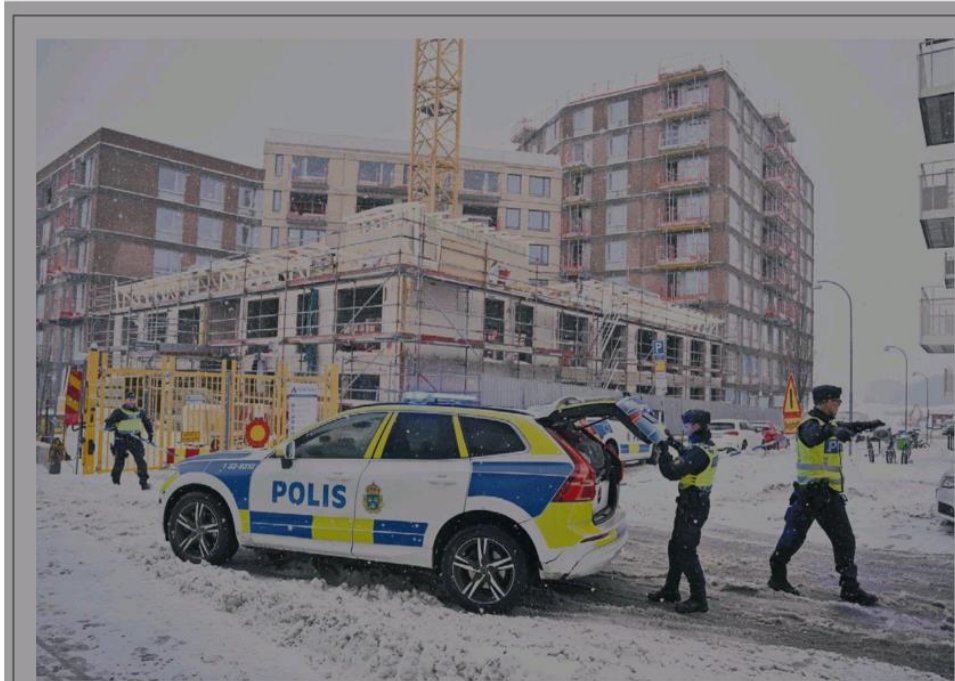
She had allegedly been sexually abused over a long period, according to medical reports forming part of a criminal case in the Palm Ridge Magistrate's Court.

"What hurts the most is that men take advantage of her disability and give her money to keep her quiet," said community activist Lebogang Maile.

"And when the court requests that she be moved urgently for her safety and recovery, the social development officials ignore this emergency."

Another activist Nombini Khoza said described the conduct of the officials as deplorable.

"We took the court order to the local social development branch, only to be given forms about some



DOWNFALL

Swedish police officers cordon off a construction site after a lift collapsed 20 meters in Sundbyberg, north of Stockholm yesterday. The lift had four or five people inside, a rescue service spokesperson said. Picture: EPA-EFE

HIV/Aids workshop," she claimed.

The official was forced to tear up the forms.

"This shows that the department is ticking boxes using community members for workshops that never take place. That is a fraud," said Khoza.

Upon summoning the manager, the activists were told that there was no space for the teenager.

According to a social worker's report, the girl had previously disappeared for several hours, with no one knowing her whereabouts. At one point in October, the grandparents went out to look for her at around 10pm. They were directed a house she was seen entering with a male.

"When the family arrived, the homeowner confirmed she had seen her with her son on several occasions. In the room said to be that of the son, they allegedly discovered him sleeping with her.

"The family had to put clothes on her and took her to the police station to open a case of rape," read the report.

A 30-year-old man was charged with raping her and he abandoned his bail application last week.

The grandmother - who is the primary caregiver and cannot be named to protect the girl's identity - told *The Citizen* she was unable to care for her grandchild due to old age.

The special needs school the child attended and government failed her, said the grandmother, who is in her late 60s.

She alleged that the school's social worker knew about the sexual abuse and why the child stopped attending.

"I don't know much but I am aware that a social worker's job is to physically check on people, especially children. We went to the school to plead for help for my grandchild, but no one cared.

"As things stand, I have no money to take her to doctors or get lawyers, so who am I to turn to?"

"We thank the activists for in-

tervening and making sure the (alleged) rapist faces the law. But my grandchild needs to live in a safe place away from the dangerous men in this area," she said.

Asked whether the child has ever told her about her ordeal, the grandmother said the teenager had over time complained about abdominal pain.

"I thought she was having period pains. She also mentioned a Rastafarian who always called her to his place and offered her money.

"At one time, she came back and spoke about someone who did things to her while she was at the park. She did not explain. I was not aware that the men were (allegedly) raping her."

Provincial social development spokesperson Nkosana Mtolo said his department needed to establish what transpired. "If there are officials who are aware of the case but did nothing, we may have to attend to that," he said.

Mtolo promised to give a detailed response by lunchtime yesterday. - getrudem@citizen.co.za

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