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# NGO demands public works remove drug dealers from abandoned Mthatha house

**Royal Peace Foundation threatens court action to take over property**

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The Royal Peace Foundation has issued an ultimatum to the national department of public works to remove drug dealers and secure an abandoned property in the CBD, which it says has been used as a drug den for many years.

The Dispatch has seen correspondence between the Mthatha-based NGO's CEO, Dr Fezile Potwana, and the department requesting to be made caretakers of the property.

The foundation works closely with the UN on civic education programmes for young people, national correction services department on community and victims programmes, and provincial SAPS on visible policing programmes.

Potwana said the property, identified as ERF 265 and located on the busy Sprigg Street, had not been used for the past eight years.

The property reportedly belongs to the SA Development Trust but had been vetted to national public works, he said.

It had previously been used for residential purposes.

In one of the letters sent to the department, Potwana wrote: "We hereby request to be made caretakers of the site which is now a threat to the community.

"It is used as a centre for drug sales to pupils and other children.

"We need to use it as we will not erect any structure but facilitate the development of communities as we have national contracts to develop



**FALLEN INTO RUIN:** The Royal Peace Foundation wants to be made caretakers of an abandoned property in Sprigg Street in Mthatha, saying it is being used as a drug den. The house reportedly belongs to the SA Development Trust but had been vetted to national department of public works. Picture: SUPPLIED

and distribute sports facilities and equipment.

"A one-year renewable contract is suitable and is cost-effective for us and your department as we are going to secure the area."

In another letter on August 4 this year, he wrote: "Remember, that property is used for criminal activities and if you are not taking care of it within seven days, we will make an application in the Mthatha high court as a res nullius property."

This means they would ask the court for the property to be considered ownerless and free to be acquired by means of occupation.

On Thursday, Potwana said they had been writing to the department to acquire the property on either a lease, caretaker agreement or to be allowed to purchase it for more than five years.

They have now given the depart-

ment until Monday next week to secure the facility and remove drug dealers operating from it.

Questions were sent to the national department for comment on the abandoned property but no response had been received at the time of writing.

However, in an email dated August 8 2023, the department suggested it was planning to appoint security guards for the property.

In another internal email among the department's officials, one stated that a project to fence the property would follow after security guards had been sourced.

Meanwhile KSD municipality's community safety MMC, Mlawuli Marasha, on the sidelines of a municipal gender-based violence and femicide event on Women's Day, said they were aware of the abandoned property in Sprigg Street.

"We were busy reviving our by-laws because once you do something without any backing from the law, it might land the municipality in trouble of being litigated," Marasha said.

"It's one of the houses we have earmarked for demolition as sometimes when we go to search there, we do find people selling drugs and arrest them."

Recently Mthatha's business community begged authorities to deal with derelict and abandoned buildings in the CBD, saying many of them were used as hideouts by thugs.

Businessman and Eastern Cape Chamber of Business president Vuyisile Ntlati was quoted as saying some buildings had become an eyesore and scary, even during the day.

He said they wanted them demolished.