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METRO

City 'playing politics' at the expense of homeless

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THE City has been accused of trying to "look good" and "playing politics" at the expense of homeless people.

This after the City in a statement said in the past 12 months, its Street People Programme Unit had helped place 2 246 homeless people in shelters as well as its safe spaces, across the metropole.

According to the City, 112 people had been reintegrated with their families or communities, 1 124 had been referred to various services, including rehabilitation and health services, and 882 were given short-term contractual job opportunities.

However the Homeless Action Coalition accused the City of playing a "very dangerous game" of trying to look good at the expense of the homeless.

The organisation's chairperson, Nnodana Hadebe, said that this was a "clean-up" operation for the City.

"I have been interacting with the people and I can tell you that what the City is saying does not speak to only their interventions. They give three-month-long jobs and the people are back homeless, with no real change. The City only assists those in certain areas, like on private properties and in the CBD. The City is not being open, we have tried to enter the safe spaces that they talk about but Pollsmoor Prison is even better than these spaces. The City is trying to look good at the expense of the homeless people," he said.

Venetia Orgill, who feeds hundreds of homeless people and runs programmes for them, added that the City's numbers looked good on paper.

"They reintegrate (people) while they have jobs, after the job ends they go back to the streets. We need

long-term solutions and proper interventions. What the City is saying is a blatant lie, I deal with them every day. They are playing politics with the lives of the homeless," she said.

Verosky Lewis who has been living on the streets in Observatory for more than 10 years, said that the City was trying to look good

"In all the years that I have been here, the City has never come here, I don't know who and where they approach the people living on the streets.

"I sleep under the bridge and sometimes others here do have makeshift shelters. Winters are the worst," he said.

The City's mayco member for community services and health, Patricia van der Ross, said the shelters were transitional spaces and not meant to provide a permanent bed/accommodation for a person coming off the streets.

"There are developmental programmes, job opportunities and reintegration efforts that see people moving from shelters into their own accommodation or returning to their families or suburbs/towns of origin all the time.

"It must also be noted that, despite all the services available, many people turn down offers of assistance. The City, along with various partners, works to put persons in touch with their families, and even facilitates transport for individuals where required," she said.

Van der Ross said that although there was no guarantee of permanent employment of Expanded Public Works Programme candidates - for qualifying people living on the street - it assisted with financial inclusion aiding in obtaining identity documents, and travelling cost of transport back home to their community of origin.