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EXPROPRIATION

# Government sets out plans for reclaiming properties

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EXPROPRIATION will help the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) curb hijacked or illegally occupied state-owned and private buildings.

This was according to Minister Sihle Zikalala, who was speaking at the Property Sector conference yesterday after conducting inspections at two state properties in Cape Town that have been unlawfully occupied for years.

"We are currently revamping Operation Bring Back by developing a joint operation strategy that will encompass other custodians, relevant departments within the security cluster and other spheres of government with an intention to recover all illegally occupied properties."

This comes against the backdrop of the tragic fire disaster at the hijacked building in Marshalltown, south of Johannesburg, in which more than 78 people died.

"We recognise that the lack of maintenance of government properties over time has been a cause of concern and has resulted in the buildings being neglected, left vacant, and prone to vandalism. We are also aware that some neglected buildings belonging to both the state and private sector have been hijacked.

"The department, working with the National Prosecuting Authority, Asset Forfeiture Unit and Special Investigating Unit, has taken people to court and recovered some of its stolen properties," said Zikalala.

He said the department was also embarking on an intensive programme of letting out vacant properties to



MINISTER Sihle Zikalala. | ARMAND HOUGH Independent Newspapers

interested investors.

"The programme will be intensified in 2024/25 financial year. The challenge of vacant buildings is also compounded by the private sector itself, which also leaves buildings unattended as they relocate for a variety of reasons. We call on the private sector to also come forward and attend to the challenge of their vacant buildings and not force the hand of government to expropriate such buildings which are proving to be a risk and owe municipal rates," said Zikalala.

He said through the Refurbishment Operate and Transfer Programme (ROTP), the department sought to attract capacity capital and skills from the private sector to partner with the government to improve the condition of specific facilities.

"With a large portfolio and constrained economic landscape, it is important that to be able to drive service delivery through the use of public infrastructure and preserve the properties, the private sector comes on board as an investment partner.

"We must work together to transform the property sector, by ensuring that property becomes affordable not only to tenants but to all South Africans," he added.