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Public Works to conduct forensic probe into hijacked state buildings

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MINISTER of Public Works and Infrastructure Sihle Zikalala said there was a need for his department to conduct a forensic investigation to determine the total number of state properties that were illegally occupied, hijacked or sold.

"The department shall use the professional services (structural engineers) to determine the condition and general state of the illegally occupied properties.

"The terms of reference and procurement strategy are at 'ready to go on the market' to source the assistance of competent service providers on the forensic audit of all hijacked and illegally occupied state-owned properties," Zikalala said.

He said the project would enable

the department to quantify with accuracy the total number of state-owned properties which are illegally occupied, hijacked and/or sold.

Zikalala was responding to DA MP Sello Seitholo, who asked about the department's resolve to intensify its Operation Bring Back campaign.

Zikalala's response came 18 months after the department indicated that it was in a process of appointing an independent service provider to assist with the reclaiming, identification and audit of state-owned properties that are either illegally disposed of or unlawfully occupied.

The department, while at the time under Patricia de Lille, revealed that it was coughing up payments for rates and services for about 1 300 properties that were unlawfully occupied.

In a separate reply about abandoned state-owned properties that

were vandalised and hijacked across the country, Zikalala said the department has identified 68 vandalised buildings and a further 27 hijacked buildings.

He said the department has put in place various measures to reclaim the buildings. The measures included securing those properties which were not secured.

There were also buildings which have been earmarked for use as offices by the clients.

"All of these buildings are in the process of being fenced and safeguarded," he said.

Zikalala said other measures included instituting legal eviction proceedings through courts and initiating demolition application process.

There was also planned maintenance for some of the vandalised properties as well as renovating and

allocating the buildings to the department's gender-based violence project.

He would not reveal the dates to reclaim the hijacked buildings as "they are dependent on the above processes".

Meanwhile, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is planning to partner with and lease out state-owned properties to the private sector with the purpose of the private sector being responsible for the maintenance.

EFF MP Mathapelo Siwisa asked about the number of state-owned properties that have been leased out to the private sector from January 2019 to date and whether the specified properties have been released back to the department in a well-maintained condition.

Zikalala said his department has conceptualised a programme called

Refurbish, Operate and Transfer Programme.

"In terms of the programme, the department is planning to lease out state-owned properties to the private sector through Public Private Partnerships for the sector to refurbish, lease out and maintain such properties over a period of time and hand them back to the state in a functional state," he said.

Zikalala also said properties such as Telkom Towers, Cervitas Building, Public Works House, Police Barracks and Department of Defence Flats have been identified in the City of Tshwane as pilot projects.

"The procurement process is expected to start at the end of the fourth quarter," he said.

Zikalala also said no property has been leased out as yet as the process is still in its conceptual stage.