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■ Picketers outside the Khayelitsha Department of Social Development.

Tempers flare at picket outside DSD offices

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Tensions erupted outside the Department of Social Development (DSD) in Khayelitsha on Tuesday morning when a group representing people with disabilities demanded that the services of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) also be accommodated on the premises.

Freedom to the Forgotten, an organisation that promotes the rights of people living with disabilities, aimed to hand over a memorandum to authorities.

The organisation felt that it was unfair to expect the Sassa Kuyasa office to be effective when the Khayelitsha population has grown so much.

However, the picket was marred by heckling with verbal insults and sporadic scuffles among marchers and members of DSD.

The trouble started just before Sibongiseni Faku, the leader of the Freedom to the Forgotten Organisation, read the memorandum. The picketers were not happy that DSD representative Fritz Gezwind could not come out of the gate to fetch the memorandum. The group hurled insults and even accused him of being racist. That prompted Makhaya Jezile, who is a DSD employee, to intervene.

The crowd shouted at him, some asking who he was to tell them what to do while some felt he was also a sellout. After long counter-arguments, Mr Gezwind left without taking the memorandum.

Talking to Vukani, Mr Faku said he was disappointed with the behaviour of the DSD officials. He said the picket was about dissatisfaction with the workload given to Sassa Kuyasa.

He said they felt that Sassa should have a space at the DSD offices in Khayelitsha. "Sassa should be part of the Department of Social Development. We feel that Social Development is shifting its responsibilities to Sassa. You can't have one office in Khayelitsha that serves millions of people. People are sleeping outside Sassa just to get a stamp for a petty thing because it is always full there. People are robbed there at night," he told Vukani.

After the heckling, Mr Jezile said he felt he could not watch while his colleague was being abused. He said for starters, the marchers came to the wrong office, they should have gone to the Sassa offices.

"I felt they were crying at the wrong funeral. Some of the demands are not for this office. They came with good intentions but later changed to insult people, even our security. They called Mr Gezwind a racist and that he is not supposed to work in Khayelitsha. That was off. I couldn't stand and watch because I was also a shop steward for that man. They should have allowed him to receive the memorandum and allowed him to respond if they were serious about their demands," he said.

Monique Mortlock-Malgas, spokesperson for MEC of Social Development, Sharma Fernandez, said it was no longer feasible for the Western Cape Department of Social Development to continue sharing premises with Sassa due to the constrained space which impacted DSD staff's ability to render effective services.

She said people need to note that Sassa is a national agency of the South African government to administer and distribute social grants, on behalf of the national Department of Social Development. She said further queries will have to be directed to Sassa or the national DSD.



■ Department of Social Development (DSD) official Makhaya Jezile in an argument with marchers.

Shivani Wahab, Sassa marketing and communications director, said a concerted effort is being made to source alternative accommodation in Khayelitsha. She said Sassa is currently located at the Kuyasa Centre.

"Sassa was originally included in the proposed renovations of the shared accommodation with the provincial Department of Social Development (Julius Tsole Building) where project meetings were participated in. Recent communication received via email, from provincial Public Works and the head of department Western Cape Social Development indicated that the space allocation for Sassa is no longer available due to lack of space at the site. Temporary structures have been considered, as an extension of Sassa services, at the Khayelitsha Mall. Based on cost implications and security concerns, Sassa approached the City of Cape Town for advice on a permanent solution as opposed to the temporary structures," she explained.

Ms Wahab said additional office space was identified at Site B in Khayelitsha by the national Department of Public Works. However, she said, this site was withdrawn by the landlord.

She said the tender had to subsequently be cancelled and a request for re-advertisement was submitted.

"A recent engagement was held between Sassa management and the MEC for Social Development. The issue of office space was discussed. The MEC requested Sassa to submit a list of areas where office space is required. The matter will be escalated to the relevant infrastructure unit in the province for further advice on special allocation for Sassa offices," she added.

Ms Wahab said the national Department of Public Works was advised to consult with various organisations in Khayelitsha for assistance in identifying potential office accommodation and vacant land to establish offices.

Responding to concerns that people have to sleep over at the Sassa office to get help, she said Sassa implemented a queue management and appointment system. "No client should have to ever sleep over at any contact point and Sassa local office management have reaffirmed this to clients.

"Sassa has implemented an online application system that clients may access via the Sassa website as an alternative to accessing a Sassa contact point physically for services," said Ms Wahab.