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New shelters opened for GBV survivors

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FIVE state-owned buildings in Waterkloof, Pretoria, that were officially handed over by Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, to the Gauteng Social Development Department yesterday, will provide a haven and support to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

Macpherson said the handover demonstrated another step in the government's mission to ensure that public assets are used for the public good.

"For far too long, state-owned buildings such as these properties behind me have stood empty while there was a real need for shelters for women and children who are caught in very difficult circumstances. At a time of a gender-based violence crisis facing South Africa, we must use these properties to provide a safe space for our women and children," he said.

He said only two properties were transferred in 2019 and 2022 to be used as GBV shelters.

He said progress in addressing critical issues has been hindered for years by budget constraints, administrative delays, and bureaucratic red tape.

"The horrifying rape of 7-year-old Cwecwe at a school in the Eastern Cape last year is a tragic reminder of why this work must be expedited. It is a national disgrace that our children are not safe in schools, in homes, in communities. That young child's suffering must not be in vain. It must be a catalyst that shakes us to the core and propels us to act with urgency," he said.

Minister of Social Development, Nokuzola Tolashe, pledged to collaborate with Macpherson to establish shelters in all 52 districts of South Africa.

She stressed the need for tangible solutions to combat GBV, saying it was South Africa's "second pandemic".

Tolashe said: "Of particular concern is that women, children, persons with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA+ community disproportionately bear the brunt of GBV, often having their rights severely violated. Tragically, women and children frequently lose their lives at the hands of those closest to them. Many GBV cases remain unreported because victims may depend on their perpetrators."

The shelters will meet basic needs such as protection, food, accommodation, and clothing, as well as offer comprehensive support including counselling, skills development, and various therapeutic interventions.

Services provided will include life skills training, psychosocial support, play therapy, healing, and restoration programmes.

Gauteng Social Development MEC Faith Mazibuko said her department spends almost R2000 towards each beneficiary at the shelters for GBV survivors, and the monthly expenses include meals, toiletries, transportation, and accommodation.

"We also fund skills development, and not that they don't have skills, but we can't just keep a person sitting there. We do find a way to also skill them. They may be interested in doing other things so that when they exit the shelter, they can take care of themselves," she said.

She said the maximum stay at the shelter is six months, however, those who can find alternative accommodation or are ready to return to their families can be released earlier.

She added that the department also pays the salaries of social workers and auxiliary social workers.

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