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 **Title:** City, Home Affairs outline plans to help Wingfield fire survivors

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Author: GENEVIEVE SERRA

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REINTEGRATION

City, Home Affairs outline plans to help Wingfield fire survivors

GENEVIEVE SERRA

genevieve.heunis@i.nl.co.za

DAYS after the Wingfield fire disaster, which affected 211 people, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) indicated it would be facilitating the process of integrating asylum seekers back into society, to allow them to work and operate businesses. They will be allowed to return and rebuild their lives at the site.

During the latest update on the fire, the City's Disaster Risk Management spokesperson, Sonica Lategan, said services to the affected parties included South African Social Security Agency (Sassa), the Department of Social Development, NGOs, the DHA the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the City's Street People Unit.

Humanitarian organisation, Gift of the Givers, also attended to immediate humanitarian relief needs. An assessment by disaster officials found that 211 persons were affected, and infrastructure damaged included 10 chemical toilets and five water standpipes.

In terms of short-term alternative accommodation for the displaced persons, they have the option of returning to the perimeter structure, staying with

friends or family off-site, or making use of shelters, the City said.

Earlier this year, the Western Cape High Court permitted the City, DHA, and Public Works & Infrastructure to pursue an eviction process relating to the occupants from the Wingfield Tent and 'Paint City' site in Bellville. Foreign nationals were initially moved to the sites under Covid-19 lockdown regulations, later demanding relocation to Europe or Canada, which the City deemed unlawful.

The sites housed nearly 340 occupants from countries like Burundi and the DRC (150 documented, 190 undocumented) and have cost State organs, including the DHA, R28 million for maintenance since inception. Wingfield was 133 616m² with a 2 000m² tent, while Paint City is 29 000m² with a 960m² tent.

In response to what happens now following the eviction process and the fire, the DHA said their role was to facilitate support for economic integration.

"The position is rather that these refugees and asylum seekers should be integrated into society as they are allowed to work and operate businesses. This policy position is informed

by court decisions such as Minister of Home Affairs and others v Watchenuka and others (010/2003) [2003] ZASCA 142; [2004] 1 All SA 21 (SCA)," the department explained.

The City said it was not in a position to comment regarding the way forward following the fire regarding the eviction process earlier pursued.

The Kensington Factreton Residents and Ratepayers Association said the challenge remained the accommodation of the affected persons, who may return to the site. "The Ward Councillor has communicated that following the clearing of the land, the affected individuals may return, but there will not be another tent, and affected individuals may return but to care for themselves."

Ward councillor, Cheslyn Steenberg, said that in consultation with the City, the site would be cleared and the affected would reoccupy the site to rebuild. "No new tent is being constructed. No building material will be provided for this rebuilding."

Resident and victim of the incident, Fatuma Mussa Rukundo told IOL that the fire caused widespread damage and left residents unsure of the next steps.