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Malawians occupy Pietermaritzburg building as repatriation crisis deepens

Emergency measures implemented amid escalating illegal immigration concern

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CLOSE to 1 600 Malawian nationals have occupied an abandoned government building in Pietermaritzburg as tensions over illegal immigration escalate.

This situation is also being felt at the Durban centre, where Malawian nationals seeking to return home are being processed. The Durban centre is currently not accepting more individuals due to reaching full capacity.

It has been reported that nearly 10 000 foreign nationals have gathered at the centre in Durban, all looking to be processed.

The Mayor of Msunduzi, Mzimkhulu Thebolla, eThekweni Mayor Cyril Xaba, along with the MEC for Public Works and Infrastructure, Martin Meyer, addressed the unfolding crisis in the Msunduzi municipality. They noted that the number of Malawians occupying the old, unused government building has doubled in the past three days.

The occupation began on Saturday after a Malawian national was killed during clashes with locals, resulting in several injuries.

MEC Meyer stated: "I was alerted to a number of people who were entering our abandoned and unutilised building for the purpose of inhabiting and sheltering. When I arrived, I saw a group of approximately 600 individuals who had

started occupying the building overnight. I was informed that they had fled from nearby areas, including a neighbouring informal settlement, following tensions sparked by the killing of a Malawian national."

By Sunday, the number had grown to around 800, and by Monday, it had increased exponentially to 1 600 illegal occupants, according to the official list. Meyer explained that plans were already underway to relocate the occupants to a safer site, with around 10 buses arranged to transport them to Durban, where they would be integrated into designated sites. However, the buses returned to Msunduzi, as there was no space available to accommodate them in Durban.

"Regarding why the buses that left Msunduzi turned back from eThekweni, the reason is that the sites in eThekweni were at capacity. They had gone from Stella to Sherwood and back to Msunduzi. Therefore, a new approach has been taken, which involves monitoring and capturing the number of openings in eThekweni sites so that only that exact number is transferred from Msunduzi to eThekweni. This would avoid unnecessary bottlenecks, as Home Affairs can only process at one site, which is in eThekweni. The priority continues to be mothers and children, along with the elderly," said the MEC.

Meyer further stated that the building is not suitable for occupation, which is



THOUSANDS of Malawian nationals are currently displaced across KwaZulu-Natal, after fleeing targeted anti-immigration threats, protests, and localised violence. As of June 2026, the crisis has escalated into a major humanitarian emergency centred around Durban and Pietermaritzburg. | PICTURES by LEON LESTRADE ANA Studio

why it was abandoned and locked.

"The building has no running water or electricity, and there is only one toilet among 1 600 people."

eThekweni Mayor Xaba detailed

the work that has been done so far. He told the members of the executive committee yesterday that, "The relocation of individuals to the drive-in site, along with the shift from depor-

tation to repatriation, has expedited the processing of these individuals. The latest figures indicate that close to 8 000 people have already been repatriated to Malawi.

"We continue to play a facilitation role in supporting repatriation processes in line with our mandate. In fulfilling this role, we are working closely with all spheres of government and non-profit organisations."

He stated that at the facilities in Sherwood as well as the drive-in centre, the municipality has provided services within its mandate, including ablution facilities, water, electricity, waste removal, and primary healthcare services, as well as the referral and transfer of emergency cases to hospitals.

Thebolla warned that the situation in the building is unacceptable and that people must be moved from there within the next few days. He stated that the municipality is providing some assistance to the people there, including water.

Arrangements are also underway for buses to transport the Malawian nationals to Lindela as part of the planned repatriation processes.

"The municipality remains committed to handling this matter with compassion, dignity, and responsibility. At the same time, it must be emphasised that the Mayor's Walk site is a temporary, informal arrangement and cannot serve as a long-term solution," said Thebolla.