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## **SPEECH**

### **MINISTER MACPHERSON HONOURS VICTIMS OF GEORGE BUILDING COLLAPSE, VOWS TO WORK CLOSELY WITH ALL SPHERES OF GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE JUSTICE**

*(Note to editors: The following address was delivered by the Minister of Public Works & Infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, at the one-year commemoration of the George building collapse at the George Town Hall on Tuesday afternoon, 6 May 2025.)*

- The Minister of Public Works & Infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, honoured the victims, survivors, rescue workers, and police officers who worked tirelessly during the George building collapse.
- The Minister said the building's collapse should not be politicised, but rather that all role-players should work together to achieve justice for the victims and their families.
- He said a report by the Council for the Built Environment and its body, the Engineering Council of South Africa, should be completed by the end of May, and he vowed to return to George to communicate its outcomes to the victims' families.

"Today, we gather not only to mark the passage of time since the building in George collapsed, but to honour the lives lost and the pain still felt.

One year ago, 34 people died and 28 were seriously injured in one of the most devastating construction failures in our country's recent memory—the collapse of a multi-storey residential building at 75 Victoria Street in George.

We remember every life lost.

We mourn every dream of a future life that was cut short that day.

We honour and thank our brave men and women, as well as canines in the South African Police Service, who worked day and night to lead the rescue and recovery effort at that site.

We thank Captain Johan de Lange and his team of investigators for building a strong legal case in search of justice for the victims.

We honour the brave men and women from our emergency services who worked tirelessly for 11 days in an attempt to save those trapped under the rubble.

They are heroes who worked through the most difficult circumstances, day and night, to rescue survivors.

We feel the pain of families whose fathers did not come home to read their daughters and sons bedtime stories, or to kiss their wives goodnight.

We are weighed down by the lifelong wait until we see them again in heaven.

Time stands still, while never truly stopping to grieve.

We stand beside every family still grieving.

And we recognise every survivor who carries the physical and emotional scars of that day.

This tragedy should never have happened.

And as government, as a country, and as human beings, we must be honest about that.

It was preventable.

And because of that, it must never happen again.

The lives lost on 6 May 2024 must not be in vain.

To honour their memory, we are compelled to strengthen accountability, fix regulatory failures, and put public safety first.

This would be a fitting tribute to them. It's the least we can do.

We must resist the temptation to reduce this tragedy to a points-scoring exercise.

It is deeply insulting to the families and to the memories of those who perished.

What happened in George is not an opportunity to advance one's own political agenda.

The pain, trauma, and human tragedy that occurred call us to work together, not against one another.

It is a story of real people, real families, and a system that failed them.

Our responsibility now is not to posture, but to fix what is broken and ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

Across the various sectors of the public sector, there were lapses.

And those must be acknowledged honestly.

There was clearly a litany of failures.

That is why I have insisted that transparency guides our work, and that those who fail in their duties—whether public servants or professionals—must face the consequences.

I commit to you, the grieving families, that justice will be sought.

Buildings don't collapse without reason.

They don't collapse on their own.

Accountability cannot be optional when human tragedy takes place at the hands of human beings.

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, through the Council for the Built Environment (CBE) and its body, the Engineering Council of South Africa, has commissioned an in-depth investigation into what went wrong.

But we already know that there is too little co-operation between entities like the Engineering Council of South Africa, the National Home Builders Registration Council, local authorities, and the departments responsible for implementation and oversight.

We expect the final CBE report to be concluded by the end of May.

I commit to returning to George and meeting the families personally to explain the findings, and not simply expect them to read about this in the newspaper.

I do not want the families to hear about what happened to their loved ones through the media.

They deserve the dignity of a direct explanation.

They deserve to be treated like grieving families seeking justice.

We have a duty of care to brief the families and will be guided by them on the report's public release.

We are also actively engaging with the South African Police Service, the National Prosecuting Authority, and regulatory bodies to ensure that if there is criminal liability, it is acted on swiftly.

No one should be above the law—not an engineer, not a developer, not an official.

But justice is not only about accountability.

It is also about support.

And I must acknowledge that in too many cases, families have been left without sufficient assistance, without closure, and in many cases, without the income their loved ones used to provide.

Where this support has been lacking, we will correct it.

People didn't just lose sons and daughters—they lost breadwinners, caregivers, and parents.

Our duty is to support them, not just with words, but with meaningful intervention.

Another issue that cannot be ignored is the vulnerability of foreign nationals working on construction sites.

There is evidence that some individuals who perished were migrant workers.

Many of them, though legally documented, remain vulnerable to exploitation and are often excluded from proper site records.

This cannot continue.

Our immigration and labour systems must work together to ensure that all workers, regardless of nationality, are protected, documented, and included in all safety and labour protections.

Dignity must not have borders.

As we look ahead, we must build a new culture of safety in the built environment.

Concrete is the second most used substance on Earth after water.

Reinforced concrete buildings have been built since the early 20th century.

There is no excuse for a five-storey residential building collapsing during construction in 2024—not in South Africa, not anywhere.

The reforms we are driving are not simply technical—they are moral.

When we cut corners, when we delay reforms, when we tolerate incompetence, it is not contracts that get lost. It is lives.

To the families gathered here today—on behalf of the Government of South Africa, and in my personal capacity—I express our deepest condolences once again.

And more than that, I commit to you that your loss is not being ignored.

It is shaping real change.

We will work harder to build a construction sector that is ethical, safe, and accountable.

We will overhaul the frameworks that have failed you.

And we will not rest until we are confident that no family must ever again experience the heartbreak that you have endured.

This is our simple commitment: to work for you and for South Africa.

To paraphrase former United States President Ronald Reagan: “We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, as they slipped the surly bonds of earth to touch the face of God”.

May their souls continue to rest in eternal peace.

Thank you.

**Enquiries**

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