



**Press Release
05 June 2019**

ALLEGED REPAIR OF HOUSES WITHOUT AUTHORISATION CONDEMNED

The Mpumalanga Department of Human Settlements has strongly condemned reported activities by individuals and business people who are allegedly rehabilitating last year's disaster affected houses at Tekwane and surroundings in the City of Mbombela without government's approval. An urgent meeting between the department and some concerned sub-contractors heard that such illegal activities are taking place in the area following early last year's storm that damaged 2130 houses at several areas within the municipality.

The sub-contractors through the local councillor requested a meeting with the Department to present the matter and discuss possible solutions. It is claimed that there are about 150 houses that have since been fixed or currently being attended to by the uncontracted individuals or business people. These people apparently hijacked the process claiming that they too deserve to be afforded business opportunities and started to rehabilitate some damaged houses without the consent and appointment by the department and government.

Head of Human Settlements, Mr Kebone Masange has strongly condemned such actions and labelled those cited as opportunistic. "All illegal activities that are taking pace should be stopped, as we only expect houses that have been sanctioned by the department to be considered and there should be consequences for such acts", he charged. The budget to rehabilitate the entire 2130 storm ravaged houses was received from the National Department of Human Settlements with strict conditions and will be audited as the project is being consolidated.

Most of the sub-contractors who attended the meeting distanced themselves from the alleged activities and submitted that they have completed their work. "I have successfully delivered on the 35 units which I sub-contracted and there is no agreement that I have with any person to either assist me or fix other houses", quipped Ms Zanele Mkasi. Like most of them, she pleaded with the department to expedite their payments and close the project as a matter of urgency. The meeting also heard of claims of additional money to extend the scope of the project – something which Masange thwarted. "If there is an exception on the project, there will be an assessment, interrogation by all relevant structures and processed accordingly", he stressed.

Local Councillor, Mr Joseph Mashaba has been given an opportunity to engage with his constituency and explain the department's position and revert to the department in due course. The project has thus far delivered **1765** of the total 2130 storm damaged houses, whilst the others are at various stages of completion with the view to complete the entire project by the end of June 2019. The May 2018 heavy storm prompted the community to embark on a two-week long disruptive public protest claiming slow progress in the rehabilitation of their houses – a situation which government appropriately quelled.

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