



Joint Media Statement

1 September 2023

South Africa's Housing Crisis Must Be Urgently Addressed

The Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), the Inyanda National Land Movement and the Rural Women's Assembly of South Africa extends our heartfelt condolences to the families, friends and neighbours who lost loved ones as a result of a devastating fire in a building in the centre of Johannesburg on 31 August 2023.

The City of Johannesburg should be held accountable for being negligent and irresponsible with maintaining its assets, such as this building, and take full responsibility for this preventable tragedy. The City owns the building and was well aware that people were living in there despite its dangerously dilapidated state. The fact that the building had long been abandoned and remained in such a neglectful state for so many years reveals the extent of the City of Johannesburg's incapacity and incompetence.

This calamity should be understood within a historical context since the building has particular significance in South African history. It was at this site where the notorious 'dompas' was issued to black South Africans. In post-apartheid South Africa, before the incident, the building was known as the Usindiso Building which provided shelter for women and children. Thereafter, the building was neglected for several years by the City of Johannesburg. This negligence allowed for the exploitation of vulnerable people, with no access to decent housing, to pay rent to non-owners of the building. This tragedy reveals that while the laws governing the movements of Africans may have changed, the housing crisis and the racially skewed ownership pattern of land means that a life of dignity and true freedom is still far out of reach for the majority of South Africans.

The lack of access to land and the housing crisis is due to the failure of all spheres of government. The City of Johannesburg failed to provide adequate housing and has particularly failed to provide women with access to land, with water, to build sustainable livelihoods. South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was not a mechanism to resolve the structural challenges of racial capitalism but rather intended to address the imbalances of Apartheid. The abandonment of the RDP by the ANC government in favour of the adoption of GEAR paved the way for municipalities and the ANC government to perpetuate the current status quo, characterised by a severe housing crisis.

The Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), the Inyanda National Land Movement and the Rural Women's Assembly of South Africa calls for a swift investigation into the incident. We call on the City of Johannesburg, the Gauteng Provincial Government and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs to apologise to the families of the deceased, provide dignified burial assistance for those families who have lost loved ones and comprehensive support to the injured and the families who have lost breadwinners and/or were displaced by the fire. We call on the City of Johannesburg to prevent the exploitation of the homeless people by rapidly addressing the housing crisis and urgently taking control of the buildings it owns, ensuring that these buildings are rehabilitated and properly maintained in accordance with health and safety standards. We further call on the municipality to make unused buildings available to vulnerable women and children and support them in converting such buildings into housing cooperatives.

For media enquiries, please email media@tcoe.org.za.

ISSUED BY THE TRUST FOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION (TCOE), INYANDA NATIONAL LAND MOVEMENT AND THE RURAL WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY OF SOUTH AFRICA