

Government is dropping the ball on relief for arts and sports communities

By Tsepo Mhlongo MP - Shadow Minister of Sports, Arts & Culture

Chairperson

R110 million in relief funds for desperate South African sportspeople and artists is still with the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture. It is a familiar pattern where the Department has routinely shown how little it cares for the welfare of our hard-working artists and sports people.

Honestly, how does the Department open a relief fund and give applicants only two days to submit all the requisite documentation. This short window period has excluded many artists and sports people from accessing this relief aid. I made repeated pleas to Minister Nathi Mthethwa to extend the application period. He refused. Azande afune ukuzwa lethu.

Only R40 million has been disbursed to beneficiaries so far. The Department is failing in its primary mandate which is to ensure the welfare of its constituents. That is unacceptable.

Now more than ever, it is important that a second phase of applications is opened to enable those who did not submit their applications in the first round to access the remaining R110 million.

Minister, you have an obligation to show leadership on this issue and answer to the cries of professionals who are desperate for assistance.

It is not a secret that the Department has a political leadership crisis. But we will not stand by allow that to condemn our sports and arts professionals to the depths of misery. With South Africans watching, we are asking the Minister to take action now and provide a safe landing for our professionals hard hit by the effects of Covid-19.

The paralysis is not only in the Department, but in Parliament too. Why is the Chairperson and the Portfolio Committee not responding to Mr Freddie Nyathela from SARA? Why has there been no urgency to deal with the rampant maladministration, corruption and abuse of power at the National Arts Council?

The Department and the Portfolio Committee have failed to meet the minimum obligations on their primary mandate during this Covid-19 crisis. How can they claim to be fostering social cohesion and national building through sports and arts, when they cannot lift a finger to help the same professionals who are the bedrock of these industries?

On a parting note, in South Africa many children in secondary schools are actively involved in different sporting events. However, active participation in school sport has declined in the past few years despite the keen interest shown by students to actively engage in sport. We need to see the memorandum of understanding that was signed by the Department of Basic Education and the former Department of Sport and Recreation brought to life because, it will assist with sport development in our country.

I thank you.