

Corruption and incompetence at Human Settlements depriving millions of poor South African families the dignity of owning a home

By **Dr Ntombi Khumalo** – DA Shadow Deputy of Human Settlements

Thank you, Chairperson.

Honourable members, members of the media, and to everyone present, I greet you all.

Chairperson, the human settlement mandate, is a very important one that ensures that human rights are not trampled on. The mandate has been guided by various policies that have received much attention over the years, yet have not received enough action to fully realise it across the length and breadth of South Africa.

The Constitution guarantees a fundamental right to progressive access to housing, and the state is compelled to take measures to honour this right. In addition, the Housing Act provides for the facilitation of sustainable housing development processes, while recognising "that housing, as adequate shelter, fulfils a basic human need."

Central to the realisation of the housing right is the participation of communities, which is the key to the success of the implementation of the Housing delivery agenda in South Africa.

Sadly, the department is notorious for rampant corruption at the cost of the dignity that should be given to millions of South Africans. Corruption in housing waiting lists is a serious problem that has gone unaddressed for decades.

The poor management and corruption associated with the housing list is indeed a hard bone to chew, as many have no idea what number they are on the list, nor that people are being pushed up the lists for sums of money which most cannot afford. Yet the robbery continues.

People are sick of being sick and tired, year in year out; the people deserve better; and South Africa deserves better!

Even when recipients finally receive their houses it is found that some still wait up to 15 years for a title deed... where is the people's dignity?

Houses for homies, the sale of state houses to fill the cookie jar, and collusion amongst those entrusted with the responsibility of seeing to the millions of South Africans who need houses... All these are just a reflection of none other than the ruling party, the ANC.

We also continue to see government officials in various departments occupying houses meant for those who cannot afford to purchase or build their own, and giving out large contracts to benefit the corrupt over and over again. Talk, paper and promises are ultimately all that the citizens get.

Consequently, the failure of the state to provide quality housing has caused many protests around the country, because while budgets are submitted and approved, in the background, deals are set for housing projects that will make use of the cheapest building material...so

much so that many brand-new houses that are given to people, are given to them with defects, such as leaking roofs, missing windows and doors that don't close.

This is, pre-eminently, the time to think and speak honestly, frankly, and boldly about the conditions our people are subjected to as a result of the corruption and poor performance of this department. There is simply no need to shrink from honestly facing these conditions.

It's time to ask, where is the pride of the Minister and her department? When a 68 year old woman has to wait 10 years to get a house. Where is the dignity?

When monies are budgeted and paid only to give birth to unfinished housing projects, as a result of corruption, at the cost many lives? Where is the dignity?

Unsafe, and poor-quality houses that threaten lives and livelihoods are given to our people. Where is the dignity?

The level of incompetence and lack of urgency displayed by some individuals who are entrusted with the critical task of providing shelter to South Africans but simply occupy positions as a result of political alignment. Where is the dignity?

And yes, it's important to have budgets that will speak to the needs of our people, but that itself is not enough.

It's not enough at this stage to be complacent. It's not enough to just allocate funds in the form of grants and not have an effective governance model over them. It is not enough for this department to simply continue with poor performance.

We need to see housing projects being monitored and evaluated correctly and efficiently with meaning and not just to tick boxes.

We need to see the communities, where housing projects are being carried out, being a part of those projects, and do away with bussing in people from neighbouring towns to do the work.

Our people can be empowered to be a part of these projects. We need to see this never-ending corruption come to an end. The only way this is possible is to ensure that there is accountability and strong consequence management that leaves no room for corruption. We need to see the department of human settlements become a tool to alleviate and lower the spiralling poverty levels in our country.

We need to see transparency; we need to see a consolidated housing list across all levels of governments and we need to see that these lists are all correlated.

This has been spoken about and written about, yet it is still non-existent. There is currently more talk that says that this will be done within the next 6 months... And so we will all hold our breath to see if there is a government that cares about equal opportunities and fairness. We need to see the different segments of the department operating as a unit.

We need to see the lives of South Africans start to matter.