**KZN Human Settlements Budget Debate: MEC must act swiftly to get his house in order**

The Democratic Alliance (DA) notes the R4.1billion budget for KwaZulu-Natal’s Department of Human Settlements. We further note than in 2020/21, this Department’s conditional grant budget was decreased by R427.70 million as a result of national government’s need to respond to Covid-19 while the equitable share budget was reduced by R11.443 million as part of KZN’s own response to the pandemic. This decreased budget has meant that fewer houses are being delivered.

***Provincial Emergency Housing Grant (PEHG)***

Despite the massive need for housing in KZN and the huge backlog that exists, there is a slow spend in this area;

·         In 2019/2020, R50.4 million of the provincial emergency housing grant funding for the 2017 floods was unspent;

·         In 2019/2020, an allocation of R86.4 million for 2018/2019 storm was also underspent and;

·         In the 2022/23 budget there is an allocation of R397.7 million for flood damage to houses in 2019 and 2020.

Today, exactly a month after the devastating floods, residents in areas such as Yellowwood Park and Reservoir Hills are still waiting for emergency housing. In the eThekwini metro, the epicenter of the floods, many are still waiting for someone to assess damage to their homes. This while there remains a lack of information and leadership from the ANC-run provincial government during this time of great distress.

***No disaster funding***

With confirmation that KZN will not be receiving R1 billion in relief aid from national government, MEC Jomo Sibiya needs to advise what this Department’s plan is. Reprioritizing this already tight budget will further stall the delivery of houses. As it stands, a person living in KZN will have to wait at least 100 years to get a house, unless of course they are politically connected.

***Disaster Plan***

It is clear that floods are the new normal for KZN. The question is: Is the Department conducting research into buildings that can withstand this force of nature? The Department must look at international best practice and implement its findings. Research and innovation must be prioritized. The destruction of environmentally protected green spaces, which are being replaced with shacks, is also having a devastating impact on climate change and must be taken seriously. The MEC must outline his Departments disaster plan? This must include plans to plan to prevent and prepare for future disasters.

***Transit camps***

The Premier has vowed to eradicate all existing transit camps by 2023. The MEC must outline how this goal will be accomplished. The DA notes the MEC’s recent delivery of KZN’s first temporary residential unit (TRU) in Molweni.  This community needs a total of 96 houses with only six having been delivered. When will the other 90 arrive? And how long will it be before these same residents are provided with permanent housing?

Not long ago, DA KZN Leader, Francois Rodgers, spent two days and two nights in the kwaMathe transit camp in Lamontville where there are only two toilets for 2 000 people. These residents were only meant to be there for a year, at most, yet they are still living there, some for almost 20 years.

This provincial government should be working to eradicate all transit camps and restore the dignity of our people with proper housing or housing opportunities. Instead, it insults their intelligence by feeding them lies and giving them false hope while the reality is that the budget and poor planning does not support their receiving houses any time soon.

***Informal settlements***

There are more than 600 informal settlements in eThekwini alone. Many have lost their lives due to the unsafe conditions and the questions that need answers are;

-        Why were they allowed to build on dangerous flood plains?

-        Why were they not stopped by the city’s land invasion unit and;

- How did so many informal settlements spring up under the ANC led city’s watch? Perhaps stopping them would not have been politically beneficial to the ANC.

The Informal Settlement Upgrade Partnership grant (ISUPG) will also never adequately address the growth of informal settlements. Growing unemployment has also led to the rise of shack lords who constantly add more homes to existing settlements. Informal settlements need to be contained. Shacks need to be numbered. There needs to be land invasion legislation in place. Some five years ago, the DA in eThekwini put forward a motion, requesting additional funding for the city’s land invasion unit so that it could work longer hours and have more manpower in order to better deal with land invasions. This was not supported by the ANC. The time to play politics and work in silos has gone. This Department must be aware of what is happening on the ground.

If informal settlements are the legacy of apartheid spatial planning, then what has the ANC done to rectify it? During the past 28 years of democracy, the number of shacks in KZN’s urban areas has only increased. It will be on the Premier and his MEC’s watch that this Department is turned around – or not. This Department must also work with EDTEA to ensure that there is economic development located near every housing project.

Last week, the DA inspected the Lacey Road informal settlement in Sydenham. Sewage ran between the shacks, most of which were dark with no windows and filled with the stench. It here that I met a young man who has a Diploma in Marketing and is now trying to find a job. Shockingly, he has spent most of his life living in this filthy environment. This is not the kind of life that our country’s freedom fighters envisioned for the people of KZN.

***Transparent housing list***

The DA is aware of people who have been waiting for housing for 50 years. Some are disabled and are not able to come up with the R5 000 bribe that could apparently secure them a home. In Mariannridge, west of Durban – where there have been a number of housing-related protests – there are cases of four generations sharing two-bedroom flats. This scenario exists in many other areas in KZN. Yet, nobody knows where they are on the housing list - or whether such a list even exists. KZN needs an open, transparent housing list, with a digitized application system so that anyone can apply and then view their position. Yet the Department does not appear to want such a system, with years of delay in implementing one.

***Irregular Expenditure***

The Department requested condonation for R413 586 798 million in irregular expenditure, with just R18 521 254 million approved. R350 000 000 million was rejected due to deviation from normal Supply Chain Management (SCM) competitive bidding processes. The forensic investigation report indicated that those transactions were subject to fraudulent, corrupt and criminal activities. The MEC must ensure that officials who engaged in this criminal activity are dealt with and that a culture of corruption will not be tolerated.

In 2018, in eThekwini, R246 million was spent on remedial measures on the 293 housing project. The city spent the money on rectifying poor workmanship with the understanding that KZN’s Human Settlements Department would reimburse the money. Here is how the Department did this. The National Department of Human Settlements set aside an amount of R40 million of the Human Settlement Development Grant (HSDG) allocated to eThekwini annually, for a total of six years. As a result of the municipality turning a blind eye to shoddy workmanship, housing delivery was set back by R246 million. The MEC must tell us whether there have been any consequences in this regard. This trend cannot be allowed to continue.

***The Extended Public Works Programme integrated grant***

The DA is disappointed to note that the EPWP integrated grant has been reduced to R6,4 million from R7,1 million. The Department must make a concerted effort to use every cent of this budget in order to create work for KZN’s people.

The MEC must act to get his house in order. KZN’s people can no longer be ignored by an uncaring ANC which does not put their basic needs first.