

Budget Vote 33: Human Settlements

Speech by Luyolo Mphithi MP, DA Shadow Minister of Human Settlements

Chairperson,

Today we are reminded of the hopes and dreams of South Africans who in 1994 hoped to secure their dignity, opportunity and their future. Embedded in these hopes and dreams was a possibility. The possibility that through housing families could find shelter for a place to eat, sleep, relax and raise a family. The possibility that families can enjoy physical and mental health and live in a safe place in peace and dignity. Possibility expressed in its utmost significance in section 26 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa: “Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing” and furthermore “the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right”.

Human Settlements, one of the country’s most crucial, front-line service delivery Departments, has destroyed this possibility. For the 13 million South Africans still living in informality, the suffering continues and we cannot be mistaken as to why it continues. It is the ANC, the breaker of promises, the protector of no one and the omen of impossibility. We know the wolves that wait anxiously for housing projects to be announced eagerly rubbing their hands at the prospect of another billion rand headed their way. A billion rand that will be divided up between incompetent cadre contractors with little going to the people. Honourable Members, this situation will abound for as long as the ANC remains in power.

House Chairperson, according to the Executive Authority statement in the APP of 2022/23, a number of priorities for the year were agreed too, including increased issuing of title deeds with a specific focus on clearing the pre-1994 stock; eradication of mud houses; digitisation of the beneficiary list; unblocking blocked projects; addressing asbestos roofs; and an increase on serviced sites. These priorities continued to form part of the current financial year (2023/24). Some of these priorities were not easily traceable or specific in the APP targets and indicators, which makes it difficult to identify and track.

For example, there were no clear strategies or targets for the number of mud houses to be rectified, or the number of title deeds to be issued, or a deadline for the digitisation of the beneficiary list, the number of houses with asbestos roofs to be targeted (houses with asbestos roofs were not included under target indicators), or a number of blocked projects to be unblocked or a target for the number of serviced sites to be provided for 2022/23 and 2023/24. Furthermore, most of the target indicators

related to reports that track progress, without clear annual targets for the number of units to be achieved for each category, making it difficult to ascertain progress on departmental priorities. In other words, the National department has no targets in relation to its core competencies. It is clear that this debate will be a list of more hollow promises for the upcoming year.

At CSOS, the entity that millions of people living in complexes across South Africa rely on for dispute resolution, there continues to be slow response to disputes that are referred and adjudicated within 90 days. Residents continue to wait in excess of a year to have their issues attended to. The National Housing Finance Corporation has still not indicated what happened to the R300 million rand transferred for rental housing relief. The entity took an entire year to finalise the disbursement policy and only 17 clients were assisted at a cost of R11 million. Now that the Covid pandemic is over the entity needs to tell us what happened to these funds?

The National Department has also instructed provinces to provide evidence of measures taken to downscale the delivery of units, encouraging provinces to move towards a site and service approach.

In the Western Cape, this rapid land release approach is coupled with pre-approved plans, bulk infrastructure, pattern books and wet cores – but in places like the Free State, unserviced land without any infrastructure in place is simply handed over to desperate beneficiaries. Why – because the ANC simple does not care.

The HDA is the subject of gross corruption and mismanagement, which has incurred in excess of R150 million in irregular expenditure in recent years. Despite the millions lost to fruitless and wasteful expenditure, the on-going investigations, and the big shot talk of our DG and DDG's about consequence management has done little to solve the problems in the entity. Honourable Members, NO ONE must come before Parliament and talk about consequence management until we start to see corrupt officials in orange jumpsuits.

The Minister in her genuine attempts has tried to rid the Department of her predecessor's corrupt patronage network, and right-size many of our most crucial entities. Time will tell if her fist is firm enough to stand up to the nefarious and dangerous characters that sit behind her. The most basic consumer and product relationship is that if something is not working for you, you need to change it.

As the DA, we understand that an inclusive economy is possible when the public sector inspires confidence. This is why the DA believes less red tape and more decentralised economic decision-making leads to more investment, more jobs, and more tax revenue to be spent by government on growing equality of opportunity and providing strong safety nets and trampolines for the vulnerable.

This cannot happen with the widespread corruption that continues unabated in the department of human settlements. These actions having taken away possibility for ordinary South Africans and deprived them of their constitutional right as outlined in section 26 of the constitution.