



MEDIA STATEMENT

KWAZULU-NATAL PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEPARTMENT URGENTLY TEMPORARILY CLOSES OLD ULUNDI ADMINISTRATION BUILDING FOLLOWING DAMAGING WEATHER, DUE TO SAFETY CONCERNS

Following damaging winds and storm which have further compromised the integrity of the old Ulundi Administrative building, the KwaZulu-Natal Public Works and Infrastructure Department has moved to urgently halt operations due to safety concerns, and pending outcomes of structural integrity reports and amidst immediate remedial interventions. This follows an inspection by a team of officials led by KZN Public Works and Infrastructure Acting Head of Department, Dr Vish Govender, which found that, in the immediate term, the facility is not suitable for staff to work from, following recent damaging weather. Currently, the building houses all provincial governments and several national government departments.

With the support and backing of MEC Martin Meyer, following a debrief, the Acting HOD has resolved to issue a directive to all government departments stationed at the LA Building to temporarily cease all operations pending further infrastructural safety investigations. Prior to this, relevant unions representing the staff were also consulted, and a shared consensus was reached that the building poses a serious safety risk and that staff be relocated elsewhere. Among the issues the department officials and the unions noted and jointly agreed on as areas of concern were a partially destroyed roof and ceiling, damaged electrical system, and furniture as well as damaged water supply systems. Some important documents also sustained damage and loss.

It is important to note that to allow for critical public services to continue, a decision was taken that a skeleton staff will be working on a rotational basis from sections of the building deemed structurally sound. This was a joint decision between KZN Public Works and Infrastructure, unions, staff representatives and organized labour. Furthermore, the MEC has thanked the unions for the collaborated efforts in ensuring the health safety and wellbeing of the affected employees.

From here, KZN Public Works and Infrastructure will now determine the various steps and interventions needed to fix the damaged infrastructure, including parts destroyed prior to this month's winds and storm.

MEC Meyer has recently reiterated that the admin building in Ulundi is not conducive for a working environment and not fit for further usage following the storm damage. MEC Meyer also cited the constant lack of water and damaged ablution facilities as another key factor which has propelled the department to put in place plans to fix and rejuvenate the building. MEC Meyer is also emphatic that the decision of the future of the building did not solely lay with the department but will also need the guidance of the provincial government.

As a precautionary measure, the KZN Department of Public Works and Infrastructure will tighten security controls in and around the building, whilst it proceeds with vigorous processes to evaluate the extent of the project costs and the degree of destruction. The Acting Head of Department, Dr Govender, will provide a comprehensive report to organized labour, the DPW&I Portfolio Committee, and the Executive Authority in alignment with the department's transparency policy, which seeks to extensively apprise all stakeholders of crucial developments impacting the department. The department is also in the process of compiling a report on the feasible options for the usage of the facility.

The guiding specific legislative reference in this regard is drawn from the Occupational Health and Safety Act No. 85 of 1993, Section 8(1) general duties of employers to their employees, Environmental Regulations for Workplaces 5 (ventilation), facilities regulation 9. SANS regulations, electrical installation regulation and other applicable legislations.

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