

CITY OF JOHANNESBURG'S WAKE UP CALL: FIRE AT USINDISO SHELTER FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

By Socio-economic rights institute

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This morning Johannesburg residents woke up to the devastating news that upwards of fifty lives have been lost in a fire in an inner city building owned by the municipality. SERI deeply regrets the rising loss of lives, and we express our condolences to the families of the deceased residents. We wish a speedy recovery to those in hospital. The building, known as Usindiso Shelter for Women and Children, was operating as a shelter for abused women and children until its neglect by the city, resulting in the building falling into disrepair and what the City refers to as its "hijacking". Unfortunately, the fire at the Usindiso shelter is an example of how the city deals with its shelters, which are occupied by many of Johannesburg's poorest and most vulnerable residents. The conditions of the shelters and transitional housing need to be urgently improved and people living in them need access to basic services. SERI has never litigated against the City of Johannesburg in relation to this building, our only involvement in the building related to the temporary placement of two of our clients by the City of Johannesburg following their displacement by a fire in September 2014. However, SERI has consistently tried to engage the City to improve conditions in its shelters, to no avail. To shift the blame to NGOs, as people speaking for the city are currently doing, speaks to the municipality's unwillingness to take responsibility for the inner-city housing crisis. Despite these tactics, and the City's ongoing recalcitrance, SERI remains determined in defending the rights of vulnerable people who face illegal evictions in the City of Johannesburg at the hands of either the state or private owners with no alternative accommodation and in direct contravention of the rights entrenched in Constitution. SERI urges the City to take this unfortunate event as a wakeup call to proactively improve the conditions in the buildings it owns and manages, as well as other abandoned buildings in order to prevent future loss of life. Contact details:

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