

Campaign to Defend WMC

By Karibu Staff

On Saturday, 19 July 2025, 61 activists, including school youth, casual and cultural workers from 18 other organisations and communities responded to Khanya's consultation to discuss the City of Johannesburg's (CoJ) threat of eviction of the College from the Workers Museum Cottages (WMC), a space of deep significance stretching back nearly three decades.

The College began to use the Cottages in 1993 as administrative offices. But, after a struggle to protect the workers compound, the Workers Museum (WM) and Cottages was declared a heritage site in 2003. In 2007, Khanya voluntarily moved out of the Cottages to enable its use as a cultural venue.

Representatives from a range of organisations attended the meeting, including the Casual Workers Advice Office, Mintirho Ya Vulavula, Community Health Workers from Gauteng, Mpumalanga and North West, PUSH, Rena le Lona, Right 2 Know, ILRIG, Abahlali base Freedom Park, Simunye Workers Forum, Uzima SA, Benchmarks Foundation, Imbumba Young Solutions, African Reclaimers Organisation, South African Jews for Palestine, and activists.

The City intends to repurpose the Cottages as office space. After thanking those present, Maria Van Driel, director of Khanya College, informed the meeting of the City's letter to Khanya in February, to vacate the Cottages at the end of March. But the Khanya Board of Trustees resolved not to give up the WM Cottages, as it was one of the last public spaces in the city accessible to working class people. At a deadlock with the CoJ on 3 July, both parties agreed to Khanya Board's position, to consult constituencies and the public on the pending eviction, and to convey the outcome of the consultation to the city in early September.

Van Driel emphasised that the WMC has long welcomed communities and working class organisations, where people can gather, interact and build community outside of their homes and workplaces; and it must be protected.

She also pointed out that the City has failed to maintain some of its own city-owned facilities and is now targeting better-kept properties. "There are least one hundred city-owned dilapidated buildings that can be restored as offices and even social housing", she said.

"We offered the City space at Khanya College's House of Movements in Pritchard Street," said Van Driel, noting that Khanya had proposed the use of its building as City offices, a suggestion that has not been taken up. The City had offered Khanya the use of Sophiatown Museum, but that is far, and creates problems of transport and fares for the youth; beside Khanya focuses on worker history in SA.

Ighsaan Schroeder, director of the Casual Workers Advice Office said, "The defence of the WMC should not be left to Khanya College alone, but needs to be defended by the working class, and all its organisations." There was unanimous agreement for this position. Schroeder also volunteered to participate in the Defend Public Spaces Campaign's Working Group set up to mobilise and defend the WMC.

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