

## **Johannesburg CBD Fire: A Call for Humanity Amidst Tragedy**

By: Kopanang Africa against xenophobia

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JOHANNESBURG - Today, our city and nation mourn the loss of lives in the devastating fire that engulfed a building at the intersection of Delvers and Albert Street. Lives of working-class people - predominantly Black African people. As of this release, 73 souls are presumed lost, with over 50 individuals hospitalized. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families during this harrowing time.

The City of Johannesburg has confirmed ownership of the building that tragically burned. The narrative by the city is that of the building being "hijacked" and this has been refuted. We note that a security guard employed by the City of Johannesburg was stationed at the property. As a country that champions respect for human dignity and has enshrined in its constitution basic human rights for all who live in South Africa, the call from this government should have been one of declaring a humanitarian disaster and rallying resources to respond and save the lives of those who survived this horrific ordeal.

Yet amidst this tragedy, it's disheartening to witness certain city officials and politicians using this incident to further their agendas of politicking to win votes. Criminalising poverty and blaming the most impoverished for living in poverty. Comments from figures like the Speaker of the House, and others, including Herman Mashaba, that insinuate the blame lies with the poor, are not only misplaced but also inhumane.

For decades, the City of Johannesburg has failed to address the housing crisis in the Inner City. The constitutional right to dignified housing has been consistently overlooked. Building owners have not been held accountable for maintaining infrastructure, leading to derelict buildings that endanger lives. Instead of addressing these issues, the city has often turned a blind eye until eviction orders are in place, allowing landowners to profit at the expense of the vulnerable.

*This press statement was released by Kopanang Africa against xenophobia on 31 August 2023.*