

WaterCan, JoburgCAN Picket Joined by Civic Organisations – Fix Water They Say!

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On Thursday, the Water Community Action Network (WaterCAN) and JoburgCAN came together to protest the current budget the City of Johannesburg allocated for water infrastructure-related work. The peaceful picket started at 09:30 AM with around 25 people holding placards, but 15 minutes into it, more and more people arrived.

By 10:00 AM, at least 65 people were participating in the picket directed by Dr. Ferrial Adam of WaterCAN, with Julia Fish, a manager at JoburgCAN, directing proceedings early on before being deployed inside to join the budget discussions while Dr Adam held the space outside.

The picketing group divided into three clusters along the corner of Jorissen Street and Civic Boulevard, singing and holding up placards. The protesters came from many different organisations including Abahlali base Freedom Park, WaterCAN, JoburgCAN, OUTA, Civic Action for Democracy and Equality, Fine Town Movement Response Team and others. There were also unions present at the budget, but their members did not join the pickets in the street.

A very busy Adam on the day told Karibu that WaterCAN wanted the City to increase the budget they tabled for water, fearing a total system collapse.

The action comes as Johannesburg and other parts of Gauteng struggle to address the ongoing water crisis. Joburg Water announced water cuts on several occasions. Additionally, according to many reports, 30% of the water in the City of Joburg is lost through leaks, with damaged infrastructure a common sight in the metro.

The water crisis has also severely affected residents in townships. Masentle Makhetha from the Finetown Movement Response Team said it was important for her to join the picket because her area has been suffering daily water cuts, those last hours and overnight. “Nowadays the water is cut off from about 12:00 PM, 10:00 AM and is restored at five o’clock in the morning. This is a challenge when it comes to the kids who have to go to school in the morning.”

She worried that if a fire broke, out they would not be able to put out the flames due to the water cuts.

The reason that they, as Abahlali base Freedom Park, joined is that some of them come from informal settlements, said another speaker, Phumza Dabata. She said that they sometimes go for up to four days without water.

“By coming here, we are trying to tell the government that these budget cuts that they are implementing profoundly affect us informal settlement dwellers.”

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