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## **STATEMENT BY THE CITY MANAGER OF JOHANNESBURG ON THE BUILDING FIRE IN THE CBD OF JOHANNESBURG**

**31 AUGUST 2023**

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we are all aware, the morning the City of Johannesburg's Emergency Management Services (EMS) responded to a fire alert at the Usindiso Building, located at No. 80 Alberts Street in Marshalltown; Johannesburg.

Sadly,

Our firefighters received their first alert at 01:19 and the first responders were on the scene at 01:29. From EMS, the City's fire department rapidly deployed the following equipment;

1. Two Fire Engines
2. One Industrial Pumper
3. One Heavy Rescue Vehicle
4. One Air Truck
5. Two Level Two Incident Command Units
6. One Bronto
7. One Ladder Truck
8. Forty-Three Firefighters and Fourteen Officers

This is in line with the South African National Standards on Community Fire Safety requirements for a building of this nature, which is a five storey building that is defined as High Rise Building.

The Gauteng Provincial Health Emergency Management Services also attended to the scene and began the process to assess, stabilize, treat and transport the injured from the incident.

At this stage, we can confirm that as of 14:00 this afternoon, Sixty-One (61) people were treated at various medical facilities in and around the City. Sixteen (16) have been discharged and Seventeen (17) remain admitted at this stage with the rest still receiving care at the Casualty Units.

These patients are receiving medical care at the following facilities:

1. Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital
2. Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital
3. Helen Josphe Hospital
4. South Rand Hospital and;
5. Tembisa Hospital

Tragically, we can now confirm that we have a total of Seventy-Three (73) fatalities. Sixty-Six (66) adults and Seven (7) Children.

Let me at this stage express our condolences to the families of the deceased and hasten to add that all efforts are being put in place to provide the families and all affected with the relevant social and psychological support through the City's Disaster Management and Social Development department.

Our Social Development department has deployed 16 social workers to provide assessment, trauma counselling and Psychosocial support.

The City of Johannesburg Disaster Management is working with the Human Settlements Department to coordinate emergency accommodation for survivors and the affected. At this stage, three (3) sites have been identified

wherein the affected will be accommodated whilst the rescue operations and investigations at the building continue.

The three sites are namely:

1. Hofland Recreation Centre in Bez Valley
2. Ekhaya shelter in Hillbrow
3. Impilo shelter in Fairview / Jeppestown

After 72 hours the Human Settlements department will advise on where they will be taken to once all logistics and related verifications have been finalised. At this stage, we believe a total of 200 or more families were resident at the Building.

I wish to also confirm that the affected building belongs to the City of Johannesburg. It is a building that was previously leased to the provincial Social Development Department and used as a shelter for abused women. At the conclusion of the lease, some challenges were encountered with the occupants and as a result of the hostilities and stalemate, the building was invaded and hijacked.

In October 2019, the City through its Group Forensics and Investigation Services raided the building and as part of the operation realized the arrest of over 140 foreign nationals by Home Affairs and a suspect was incarcerated and charged for illegally collecting rental from tenants at the building. The case is with SAPS and no update is immediately available at this stage.

At this stage, Fire Safety has commenced with investigations into the cause of the fire and has been part of the rescue operation from the morning. There is at this stage no preliminary reports.

As the City we appreciate the assistance and offers assistance that we have received thus far and we continue to coordinate all efforts via the Joint Operations Centre of the City in response to this disaster.

As earlier stated, this is a tragic event and incident and one that is unprecedented given the number of lives lost. We will do our best to ensure that act diligently in investigating the fire and equally, in our pursuit to reclaim hijacked and illegally occupied buildings in the city.

Thank you!