



CITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Member of the Mayoral Committee
Councillor Anthea Natasha Leitch
Human Settlements

Media Statement

Release: Immediate

Date: 17 October 2023

MMC addresses Home Affairs workshop on international migration

This morning, Human Settlements MMC Anthea Leitch stood in for Executive Mayor Cllr Kabelo Gwamanda at a workshop hosted by Home Affairs Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi to discuss the difficult topic of international migration.

The workshop at the Birchwood Conference Centre in Boksburg has run from 16 to 17 October and was well attended by ministers, MECs, mayors, other MMCs, officials, dignitaries and various stakeholders.

Mayors in particular were tasked with providing insight into their own experiences and suggestions on solving the numerous problems currently facing their municipalities.

In her address, MMC Leitch recognised that even though Johannesburg is the richest city on the African continent with the biggest budget, it also has some of the biggest problems.

“Of course, not all our problems are caused by illegal migration, but I would be lying to you if I stood here and told you that they are not giving us serious headaches. It is a major crisis for the City of Johannesburg indeed. As the MMC for Human Settlements, which is my portfolio and which I will therefore rely on as reference, our department feels the effects of illegal migration every single day.”

Illegal immigrants were targeting Johannesburg as a destination of choice, she said.

Finding places to live for 120,000 to 200,000 people every year “is not a small feat”.

She referenced Rabie Ridge in Midrand and other places, “where the community just keeps on trying to occupy the land”.

“They occupy it, we remove them, and they just keep coming back. It’s like a war, a war to occupy any open space available. Whether these people are foreigners or locals, there is truly very heavy migration to Joburg, and it places pressure on every aspect of our infrastructure and services.

“If it was just locals, that would be one thing, but more often than not there are always illegal foreigners in the mix. The most famous and unique example for Johannesburg is the zama zamas who are mostly foreigners. We need a local mining company to go in to replace them and create jobs for South Africans.

“When buildings burn or are condemned, as we saw recently with 80 Alberts Street and 1 Delvers Street in Marshalltown, the Human Settlements Department is left with the conundrum of what to do with the undocumented occupants. We know that we have to provide temporary emergency accommodation to South Africans, but what are we supposed to do with the foreigners who occupy more than 50% off these buildings, from the audits that were done?

“At the camp and temporary shelters we put up at Wembley Stadium, illegal foreigners have been living in tents since 2018. They all tell the same story of how they lost their travel documents in the fire. They chase away their embassies when they come there. What exactly does national government want us to do with them? The presence of this camp is an eyesore next to the Turffontein Racecourse. The local community wants their sport facility back. They complain that crime has gone up.

“After SERI took us to court to keep the Delvers Street occupants in their unsafe building, a court order was handed down that said we should take them to a piece of land near Kibler Park. When the community there got wind of that, absolute panic spread like wildfire. They were concerned they would soon be overrun by thousands of illegal immigrants and that there would be rampant crime and their properties would be rendered worthless. Middle class people with SUVs went and barricaded the road and said they would camp on the vacant land to make sure no tent or shack could ever be erected. They were particularly alarmed that the fire victims might be illegal foreigners.

“By then we had already decided the previous day to take the fire victims somewhere else in the inner city, but that whole incident was a big lesson for us. The same people who will call other people xenophobic will suddenly be prepared for a fight to the death when they think illegal foreigners are coming into their own back yard. Their generous liberal ‘values’ will be very difficult to find then.”

The MMC warned the gathering that although the ward councillor had agreed to let the city take the fire victims to his ward, the locals had been “adamant that they only want to see South Africans”.

“They have vowed that they will kill any foreigner if we take them there. So what must we do?”

She proposed that the only answer would be for home affairs to join the city and make sure every illegal foreigner is “processed and deported”.

“We need that to happen for the tent occupants of Wembley Stadium too, or national government must tell us what else they want us to do.

“In Johannesburg, most of our temporary residential units have themselves become permanently occupied and even hijacked. There’s no legal framework that allows for people to live for free in this way – permanently – in properties owned by the state, but it’s currently happening.

“The NGOs, citing human rights, force us to keep illegal occupants in unsafe and hijacked structures, and they complicate our management of temporary housing facilities, since they insist on blurring the lines of what we are constitutionally obligated to do as the state.

“We are one of the few, if not the only, countries in the world to have no refugee camps. That decision was made for all sorts of noble reasons, I’m sure, but it has left us exposed as a society. It has made South Africa more attractive than Europe for illegal migration, which is something I’m sure Europeans are very happy about.”

She stressed that the country would need to find legal, fair, peaceful and sensible ways to make South Africa less attractive as a destination for illegal migration.

“That may not sound pleasant, but why would we want to make it more attractive?”

MMC Leitch referenced the city’s existing migration policy from 2011 – which speaks about the existence of a migrant helpdesk to help migrants integrate into the city.

“It speaks to creating social cohesion and acceptance. However, it is not practical and not in line with legislation. It’s basically saying, ‘Come to Joburg, we love you all.’

“If you want to move to South Africa and live and work here, you should offer a scarce skill or come and invest in the country.

“We have a current backlog of half a million RDPs. Whenever Joshco advertises that social housing applications for a new building are open – let’s say with 120 units – then 10,000 people apply. We are struggling to keep up with the housing demands of South Africans. To add in the demands of illegal immigrants with little to no means of looking after themselves on top of that is not sustainable and is disrupting our society in ways that liberal researchers are not willing or are unable to tell us the truth about.”

The MMC recognised that all departments were feeling the strain.

“If you speak to the Health Department, they will tell you about the anger of people competing in queues for services and medicines at clinics and hospitals ... how hospitals like Rahima Moosa are overrun and leave pregnant women to sleep on the floor.

“Our health inspectors are not coping with monitoring spaza shops and the dangerous and expired products being sold there. Or, let’s be honest, they are just taking bribes.

“Let’s not even get into the never-ending battle of illegal electricity connections for city power, the by-passing of water pipes and broken taps that run 24/7; of the mountains of rubbish and armies of rats that face Pikitup at hijacked buildings and informal settlements all over the city; of the increasing debt at the Finance Department; of the challenge of monitoring informal and illegal traders and hawkers; of JMPD’s war against by-law infringements. Of Development Planning’s ongoing nightmare of planning for real development.

“This workshop was much needed, Minister, and we need to hear about and implement real solutions of how we can restore law and order in Johannesburg. We are committed and we are here to restore our city and to map a way forward.”

Ends

For Media Enquiries Contact:
Cala Schultz
Office of the MMC Human Settlements
083 657 3602
calas@joburg.org.za

E-mail: AntheaLe@joburg.org.za
222 Smith Street, Braamfontein, PO Box 1049, Johannesburg