



Restoring the Rule of Law in the Inner City of Johannesburg

Dear Residents of Johannesburg,

When we launched high-impact service delivery operations in the inner city, they were anchored by a clear commitment: the era of lawlessness in our city centre is over. From Small Street to the High Court precinct, we have acted decisively to restore dignity and safety by addressing illegal trading, unlawful structures, and hijacked buildings.

This commitment has been most visibly tested at Marble Towers. When the City acted against illegal structures in and around this building, the owners sought an urgent court interdict. We respect the legal process because a government that enforces the law must first abide by it. We presented our case, and the high court ruled in favour of the City.

It found that the structures at Marble Towers were unlawful, erected without any approved building plans despite notices and inspections dating back to 2022. The Johannesburg High Court was clear in its judgment: all illegal structures inside Marble Towers were to be removed, and the building be brought into full compliance with safety regulations. The court further ordered that all non-compliant structures must not be occupied or accessed by any person.

Despite the high court's clear directive, our inspections on 10 July and again with the MMCs for Development Planning and Economic Development, Cllrs Eunice Mgcina and Nomoya Mnisi, found continued non-compliance at Marble Towers. Owners and occupants continue to defy both the court and city by-laws by trading in prohibited areas. The City will not tolerate ongoing contempt and will ensure consequences for non-compliance.

A court order is not a suggestion. The owners of Marble Towers have had ample opportunity to comply but have not done so. The City will now enforce the judgment, shutting down unlawful trading and securing non-compliant structures as directed. Continued defiance will result in further legal action.

The City is also considering the formal closure of Marble Towers, removal of illegal structures, and a permanent Metro Police presence to ensure compliance.

Residents are reminded that this building owes the City approximately R14 million in rates, water, and electricity, with less than three percent paid. Those who refuse to meet their obligations cannot expect to continue operating.

Our recent operation highlighted ongoing challenges, including unpermitted thrift stores, confiscation of goods lacking barcodes, and business owners unable to prove their legal status in South Africa. While progress has been made, the fight against illegal trading continues.

For this reason, I have called Home Affairs Minister Dr Leon Schreiber for urgent intervention. Johannesburg faces a challenge requiring a coordinated law enforcement effort. Many buildings and businesses may be harbouring undocumented foreigners, raising serious concerns.

We call for collaboration among all relevant agencies to enforce the law and restore order. Those in the country legally have nothing to fear, but violations will be met with decisive action. Johannesburg cannot allow lawlessness to threaten its residents' safety and well-being.

Our by-law enforcement operations will now take place weekly. Once the Marble Towers precinct has stabilised, we will expand these operations to other parts of the CBD, precinct by precinct, until our inner city is restored to a place of order, safety and opportunity. This is not a once-off campaign. It is a sustained programme of reclamation and will continue for as long as it takes.

Our message is clear: We are reclaiming our inner city, enforcing by-laws, and upholding the rule of law without fear or favour. Our courts have done their part. The City will now do its part.

I ask you, the residents of this great city, to do yours: report by-law violations, support lawful businesses, and stand with us as we rebuild the Johannesburg we all deserve.

Until next time,
Johannesburg Executive Mayor Councillor Sello Dada Morero