

'THERE NEEDS TO BE LAW AND ORDER IN THE INNER CITY' - RAMAPHOSA ON JHB CBD FIRE

An early-morning blaze on Thursday tore through a five-storey building owned and neglected by the City of Johannesburg. The flames claimed the lives of at least 74 people, including 12 children, while more than 50 others were injured.



President Cyril Ramaphosa (centre) on a site visit to assess the damage from the fire tragedy at a residential building in Marshalltown, Johannesburg on 31 August 2023. Picture:

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[Veronica Mokhoali](#) | 01 September 2023 06:50

JOHANNESBURG - President Cyril Ramaphosa said that the illegal occupation of the dilapidated building at the centre of the Joburg CBD tragedy was a disaster in waiting.

An early-morning blaze on Thursday tore through a five-storey building owned and neglected by the City of Johannesburg.

The flames claimed the lives of at least 74 people, including 12 children, while more than 50 others were injured.

The abandoned building which once provided emergency shelter for women and children slowly filled up with squatters, illegal electricity connections and flimsy room dividers, rendering it a death trap to more than 200 families.

The president, who cancelled a scheduled address to the nation, visited the scene of the disaster on Thursday.

Ramaphosa said it was important for the government to address the root cause of the blaze.

"We've got to address this problem and root out those criminal elements because it is these types of buildings that are taken over by criminals, who then levy rent on vulnerable people and families. There needs to be law and order in the inner city."

He added that the police also needed to clamp down on criminals who extorted money from the residents of these derelict dwellings.

"Not that it's being allowed to happen, it's an overwhelming problem, which the city, I know, has been working on addressing. This building is owned by the city and they sought to try and get order into this building."

Meanwhile, City of Joburg Speaker Colleen Makhubele, MMCs Mgcini Tshwaku and Kenny Kunene and former mayor, Herman Mashaba, [said that the catastrophe could have been averted](#) had it not been for civil society organisations that had often dragged the metro to court over "illegal evictions".

Joburg city manager, Floyd Brink, confirmed that the city owned the building: "This is a building that we previously leased to the provincial social development department where they used it specifically as a shelter for abused women. At the conclusion of that particular lease, some of the challenges that were encountered with the occupants and as a result of the hostilities and the stalemate, the building was then invaded and hijacked."

Brink said they did not yet know what caused the blaze.

"We will do our best to ensure that we act diligently in investigating the fire and equally in our pursuit to reclaim the hijacked and illegally occupied buildings in the city. We would at some point provide you with further information and plans on what it is we are doing specifically with the level of lawlessness and hijacked buildings within the City of Johannesburg"