**African Christian Democratic Party**

**10 May 2022**

 **ACDP Parliament
Budget Vote 33: Human Settlements
Speech by ACDP President, Rev Kenneth Meshoe MP**

**ACDP leader welcomes plan to digitise the housing list, but warns against simply digitising corruption and enabling cybercrooks**

“Deputy Speaker,

An NGO called “ASIVIKELANE”, that helps the voices of South Africa’s informal settlements to be heard, estimates that more than 5 million South Africans live in informal settlements. Our housing backlog is estimated to be about 3.7 million and increases by about 178 000 every year, and we are yet to know where the beneficiaries are on the lists. The ACDP that believes in the principle of transparency, would like to see a consolidated digitalised list that will always be in the public eye to counter corruption.

The Department of Human Settlements has many performance challenges.

According to the minutes of a DHS committee meeting in November last year, major areas of concern relate to poor performance with the upgrading of informal settlements.

Residents of informal settlements face considerable flood and fire risks. Most have to walk long distances to taps or rivers to fetch water in buckets, and fire-fighters struggle to put out the flames when confronted by un-named shacks and winding paths - without guides to help them. Finding the sources of fires at times can be impossible.

It has been reported that between January and September 2021 in Cape Town alone, for example, there were almost 1 200 shack fires, with about 80 victims dying before the end of June.

Honourable Members, the appalling loss of life, limb and property in the recent KZN floods could also have been reduced had the DHS done more to upgrade informal settlements in that province. According to Darrin Green, the African head of international infrastructure consulting firm AECOM, much could have been done to lessen the recent flood damage. The evidence for this is that areas that were properly planned and had “well-maintained indigenous vegetation” suffered a great deal less than those with “uncontrolled development.”

Some informal settlements even prevent service delivery, Madam Minister. In places such as Siyahlala in Langa, Cape Town, shacks have been built near railway lines, thus preventing trains from operating. Unbelievably, this Siyahlala informal settlement began on land belonging to PRASA in 2016. Yet only in January 2021 did PRASA start talking to the residents of that informal settlement to relocate.

Registration of title deeds is another major concern with respect to the Human Settlements Department. Homeowners with title deeds feel encouraged to improve their assets. They can start businesses using their properties as collateral; or even grow intergenerational wealth by leaving land and houses to their children.

It was reported that at the DHS committee meeting of 10 November 2021, it was agreed that “poor performance with title deeds” was a “major area of concern.” It was even admitted that, “There are still pre-1994 title deeds where some of the beneficiaries have passed on,” and that only 3 400 title deeds were distributed throughout the country in the previous year. This is shocking indeed. Only three provinces – North West, KZN and Western Cape – had used their title deed grants fully; while municipalities in the Eastern Cape do not even have the systems they need to administer title deeds.

Nevertheless, Hon Minister, the ACDP welcomes your call for an audit of unfinished and blocked housing projects across the country. It is very sad when taxpayers’ money has been spent and service delivery is still left undone. Your department needs to do more to empower and capacitate its provincial and local government counterparts. There must also be swift penalties and serious consequences for contractors doing shoddy work.

Corruption is another serious challenge that must be dealt with. The ACDP welcomes the plan to digitise the housing list, but warns against simply digitising corruption and enabling cybercrooks. A computerised database is just a representation of reality and has no special powers to do away with incorrect information in and of itself. The fact of the matter is that proper records of RDP beneficiaries must be kept. Allegations abound that RDP houses are being sold illegally by syndicates that involve police officers, councillors and municipal officials.

In conclusion, Honourable Members, the ACDP will be monitoring the progress of this department. Next year we hope to see more informal settlements upgraded and more title deeds handed out.

I thank you.”

**-ENDS-

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