

PUBLIC PROTECTOR VISITS NALA MUNICIPALITY IN THE FREE STATE

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The Public Protector Adv Thuli Madonsela on Wednesday visited the Nala Municipality in the Free State province where she inspected a number of homes affected by a dysfunctional sewage system, a sewage pump that is not working and a purification plant that has not been working for weeks.

The Public Protector's visit was in response to an invitation by a committee representing residents who complained that they had been reporting their plight to the Municipality and other organs of state for a long time without making reasonable progress.

The focus of the complaints from the community was alleged failure to implement a forensic report conducted by a reputable private firm, in which several findings on maladministration were made and people fingered for improper conduct.

After the Public Protector explained that the responses she had received from appropriate authorities revealed partial implementation of the forensic report, it was agreed that her office would request further information regarding the state of implementation of the rest of the report.

The agreement included an understanding that the public protector would ensure full accountability by all persons implicated in the report, whether they were officials or office bearers in the municipality or service providers who allegedly defrauded the municipality by claiming and collecting fees for work not done.

Together with community leaders, ordinary residents and a small media contingent, the Public Protector Team involving national and provincial members, visited several sites to inspect alleged defective infrastructure.

Sites that were visited included an unfinished RDP settlement where construction had mainly stopped after the installation of foundations, a place next to a school and several homes where until a few days ago was an open sewage dam; one of the homes service by the bucket system and where such buckets are allegedly collected after lengthy periods causing several hygiene challenges, a broken sewage pump and a purification plant that has allegedly not been working for weeks.

The Public Protector met with residents that had spontaneously gathered to hear from her and her team regarding her plans "to restore their dignity and ensure justice."

The Public Protector undertook to work with the municipality, the province and national government to find answers and to ensure that services are urgently restored to the community. The undertaking adopted a phased approach that would ensure that urgent matters such as the collection of buckets on a daily basis and repairing the purification plant were attended to within seven working days while answers regarding the implementation of the audit report, the partially constructed RDP houses and permanent fixing of the sewage system were to be attended to on the basis of a time bound plan of action to be provided by the relevant authorities.

It was agreed that the plan should also deal with improving communication between the community and municipal authorities, particularly the care taker recently appointed by the Premier.

The Public Protector has requested an urgent meeting with the Premier, the MEC for Human Settlements and representatives of the Nala Municipality to brief them about her visit, solicit answers

to pertinent questions and agree on a plan of action to address the concerns revealed during her inspection and discussions with residents.

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