



**PRESS STATEMENT
16 SEPTEMBER 2020**

CITY OF CAPE TOWN'S SMEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST HOUSING ACTIVISTS SIGNALS A REPRESSIVE STATE SHIFTING BLAME FOR ITS FAILURE TO ADDRESS THE CITY'S LAND AND HOUSING CRISIS

Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU) unequivocally refutes claims and inferences made by Cllr JP Smith that NU, or its staff, instigated land invasions in Khayelitsha. These claims were made in Cllr JP Smith's presentation to the Western Cape's Standing Committee on Human Settlements on 16 September 2020.

Ndifuna Ukwazi's community organisers present at the demolitions which took place in informal settlements in eThekweni and Makhaza throughout April to July 2020, concerning at the peak of the pandemic and the lockdown, had responded to calls from affected residents to the Khayelitsha Community Action Network (CAN). As activists supporting the Khayelitsha CAN, the primary role was to defend and protect the occupiers' constitutional and statutory rights, which includes protecting occupiers' rights to not have their homes demolished without an order of court. This was part of their broader humanitarian response to the crisis posed by the pandemic, particularly as Khayelitsha presented some of the highest infection rates in the Western Cape at the time.

Addressing a crisis of landlessness, tenure insecurity and the inability to access a home is complex. However, these are not issues that can be resolved through heavily armed state militia and the criminalisation of informality and black bodies. It is increasingly clear that people are in need of secure homes, and that the state has failed to meet this need. It is also evident that the state's current approach of focussing on symptoms and not the root issue of landlessness is unsustainable, and only serves to exacerbate the crisis of insecure tenure and the need for access to adequate housing.

Instead of responding to the City's role in addressing a deepening crisis of landlessness and lack of access to housing in our city, leaders like Cllr JP Smith have specifically targeted human rights defenders and prioritised the surveillance of housing activists. This is concerning. A prime example is the arrests of Ndifuna Ukwazi community organisers Luyanda Mtamzeli, Nkosikhona Swaartbooi, and the Social Justice Coalition's Axolile Notywala on 24 July 2020. Some of these activists sustained serious injuries at the hands of Law Enforcement without provocation before being herded into Law Enforcement vehicles. The prosecutor declined to prosecute on all charges indicating that these arrests, instructed by Cape Town's Law Enforcement (and not the SAPS as claimed by the City) had ulterior motives. This conduct is the signature of an authoritarian regime and displays the hallmarks of political repression and the wilful destruction of our constitutional project premised on the advancement of human rights and freedoms.

- Read NU's press statement on the baseless charges against housing activists (28 July 2020) here: <https://jumpshare.com/v/Nx1KeNgVHlx7RS82hmMA>

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