

PRESS STATEMENT

1 April 2021

**LOW-INCOME TENANTS CALL FOR MINISTER LINDIWE SISULU TO
PAY R600 MILLION RENT RELIEF AS PROMISED**



Image: A collage of Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Lindiwe Sisulu made out of the faces of some of the affected tenants.

Despite repeated promises to pay R600 million in rent relief to low-income tenants struggling to pay for their rental as a result of the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, the Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Lindiwe Sisulu has published no details of the rent relief scheme and made no payments.

Today, social movements, civil society organisations and hundreds of affected tenants are joining a petition calling on the Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Lindiwe Sisulu to allocate and release the funds intended for the Rent Relief Scheme.

On [21 July 2020](#) the Minister announced in her budget vote speech that her Department planned to allocate R600 million towards rental relief to tenants in affordable housing facing financial distress due to the economic ramifications of the COVID 19 pandemic. This funding, aimed at tenants in 'formal affordable housing', was meant to help those facing the threat of homelessness to meet their monthly rental obligations. In her speech, the Minister promised that the details of the rent relief for such tenants would be published (by way of policy) within 30 days after her address. It is now more than eight months following this public commitment and no details of the relief scheme; [policy published](#), and funding has been received by tenants, who make up some of the people hardest hit by the pandemic and its economic fallout in our country.

The Minister herself has repeatedly stated that the pandemic has exacerbated existing social and economic inequalities. The national lockdowns imposed by the government to save lives have had the inadvertent effect of creating societal insecurity: many people have lost their incomes and livelihoods or have had their incomes diminished, are facing the threat of losing their homes and are experiencing unprecedented rates of hunger. Together with social movements and organisations working with those experiencing such insecurity, we have persistently advocated for the equitable bearing of the societal burden of the pandemic by calling for the state to ensure that there is adequate support to tenants and homeowners so that they do not emerge from the pandemic overladen with housing-related debt as a result of financial and economic circumstances created by the pandemic.

But, the reality is that between 2.2 and [3 million people](#) lost their jobs in the first months of the national lockdown. This has created a situation where households are caught in a double bind between maintaining their shelter and having enough food and water to stay alive. The undertaking to provide R 600 million in rent relief was made to prevent the crisis that many of the [3 720 000 tenants](#) living in South Africa may now find themselves in. According to [Statistics South Africa's quarterly labour-force survey](#), the unemployment rate reached 32.5% in the last months of 2020, with 16.5% of those who were still employed through lockdown receiving a reduction in their pay. The survey further found that household disposable income dropped by 13.6% in the 2nd quarter of 2020. Correspondingly, the [TPN Residential](#)

[Rental Monitor](#) for the fourth quarter of 2020 found that low end tenants had the weakest rental payment performance. Specifically, the report states that:

the “Less than R3,000/month” rental segment is populated by the most financially fragile tenant population, with significantly fewer financial “buffers” with which to weather any storms that translate into income loss, or those unexpected household expenses that arise periodically.

The consequences of the Department’s failure to honour its promises to provide rent relief stands to be even more dire. On [9 March 2021](#), DA Shadow Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Cilliers Brink announced the party’s call for the urgent lifting of Alert Level 1 lockdown regulations citing property owners’ inability to obtain eviction orders under the current lockdown regulations. There is no doubt that landlords have had to be patient. But, should the regulations be amended in this way, it will lead to large-scale evictions - both legally and illegally - and a mass homelessness crisis like we have not seen before. This, in a context where local governments, like the City of Cape Town, claim they are [incapable of providing sufficient emergency alternative accommodation](#) to evictees and victims of ‘undeclared’ disasters. Moreover, homelessness will lead to additional developmental and other costs, further burdening the state.

We are teetering on the brink of a secondary national disaster where we stand to exacerbate a health crisis into a homelessness crisis. The [former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing](#) Leilani Farha has cautioned that “[i]n the face of this pandemic, a lack of access to adequate housing is a potential death sentence for people living in homelessness”. A home has rarely been more of a life or death situation – housing remains healthcare. In the face of an [impending third wave](#), it is imperative that the national eviction moratorium remain in place in the months to come and for a [reasonable period](#) after the pandemic.

We therefore call on the National Department of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation to mitigate these potentially devastating consequences and:

1. Prioritise tenants whose income has been most affected by the pandemic;
2. Publish the policy document detailing to whom and how the money will be allocated;

3. Provide clear timelines for when the above will take place;
4. Keep the public regularly informed on any and all progress; and
5. **PAY THE MONEY!**

Sign the petition here: <https://awethu.amandla.mobi/p/pay-rent-relief>

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ENDS

ISSUED BY NDIFUNA UKWAZI

The call for Minister Sisulu to release the rent relief is endorsed by the following organisations, social movements and tenant associations:

1. **Abahlali baseMjondolo**
2. **Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD)**
3. **Association For Rural Advancement (AFRA)**
4. **Botshabelo Unemployment Movement**
5. **Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS)**
6. **Communicare**
7. **Communicare Tenant Beneficiaries**
8. **Equal Education (EE)**
9. **Equal Education Law Centre**
10. **Housing Assembly**
11. **Inner City Federation**
12. **Inner City Resources Centre**
13. **International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG)**
14. **Land Access Movement of SA**
15. **Land and Accountability Research Centre (LARC)**
16. **Legal Resources Centre (LRC)**
17. **MOATANE ATANG Residents Association**
18. **Nkosa Economic Socio Institute (NESI)**
19. **Organisation for Civic Rights**
20. **Poor Flat Dwellers Movement**
21. **Qala Phelang Tala**
22. **Reclaim the City**

- 23. Rent Strike - SA**
- 24. Right to Know (R2K)**
- 25. Social Justice Coalition (SJC)**
- 26. Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI)**
- 27. Stellenbosch Backyard Dwellers Forum**
- 28. Women's Legal Centre**