

MINISTER PROMISES ACTION

Crackdown on construction mafia

SIYABONGA SITHOLE

siyabonga.sithole@inl.co.za

IN 2023, the Inclusive Society Institute wrote a document titled "Overview of the Construction Mafia Crisis in South Africa", revealing that construction sites, seen as the bloodline of service delivery and much-needed jobs, had become prime targets of decentralised syndicates, known as construction mafias.

Last year, then-minister of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) Sihle Zikalala promised to deal with the syndicates who had wreaked havoc in some of the big projects under his department.

His comments on them followed hot on the heels of a 2022 incident in which a group of Durban gunmen, believed to be from a business forum, forced their way onto a Durban High Court construction site and chased away workers and contractors.

Since then, there has not been much progress in ridding the country of the syndicates that continue to hijack pri-

vate and government projects.

This week, newly appointed DPWI Minister Dean Macpherson promised to hit hard against tender and construction mafias. His tough stance comes after the recent kidnapping and murder of five men allegedly linked to a Mamelodi Boko Haram group.

The victims of the recent attack were reported to have been abducted on their way to Mamelodi after a construction site dispute in which they had demanded a 30% stake in the project and warned that there would be dire consequences if they did not get it.

Reacting to the latest developments, Macpherson said his department would not be held to ransom by those involved in the practice.

"We, as the department, have no room for construction mafias and people who want to stop our projects. We will not be negotiating or discussing anything with them. We want to get our project running and deliver services to the communities. Mafias will not be getting away with that ... Those who

are involved must think twice," he said.

This is not the first time the minister had issued a stern warning against construction mafias. Last month during his budget vote of R23 billion, he had choice words for those who destabilise infrastructure projects through extortion.

"I want to ask each one of you to join me in this incredible journey to turn South Africa into a construction site. We must be obsessed with infrastructure-led economic growth that will create jobs throughout South Africa.

"I want to be clear: anyone who seeks to hold back infrastructure projects must be treated as an enemy of the state and will be dealt with appropriately," he said.

According to Inclusive Society, over the past 15 years, the country's once-thriving construction sector has experienced a sharp decline because of construction mafias. "Construction mafias, often labelled 'business forums', are networks that employ violence and other illegal means of controlling access to public sector procurement opportunities," it said.