

20 February 2022

Memorandum: Fix and open all wards at Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital as a matter of urgency

Attention: Gauteng Premier David Makhura

Today, we stand outside Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital, echoing the pleas of the thousands of patients from several provinces who rely on this hospital for their healthcare.

We repeat the plea of dedicated medical, cleaning and administrative staff from Charlotte Maxeke and surrounding hospitals, who have borne additional strain since the April 2021 fire that seriously damaged parts of the facility.

We share the concerns of residents and workers from surrounding areas, who now contend with clogged-up roads, as the hospital's carpark has been closed due to the fire.

We carry with us the worry of ordinary people in the face of what appears to be an uncaring attitude from the state. Why is there no urgency in ensuring that all of the hospital's 1088 beds are once again available for the sick and infirm?

The adage, 'where there is smoke, there is fire', holds true for Charlotte Maxeke Hospital, in more than just the literal sense.

It has been 10 months since the fire broke out at the hospital, destroyed part of the carpark and causing smoke damage, yet according to the media, there is still no forensic report available.

Thirty percent of the hospital, including casualty, the specialist psychiatric ward and the cardiothoracic ICU remains closed. Despite the oncology unit being opened, reports indicate waiting lists of about 2000 patients!

It is extremely concerning that delays around repair work have been attributed to two Gauteng provincial departments – health and infrastructure development - being unable to agree on the scope and budget for the work. The national health department had to be brought in to lead the hospital's rehabilitation project.

What disturbs us though, is that nine officials from the two provincial departments in question have been suspended – officials who up until recently may have sat in close proximity to the multi-million Rand refurbishment contracts.

Furthermore, it gives us no comfort that two companies with a track record that provides little reassurance, seemed to have been involved in the project.

Over and above this, reports indicate that in the last six years, there have been four fires at public health facilities in Gauteng. In 2018, the provincial health department's head office itself was devastated by a blaze, in which three firefighters lost their lives. This puts into question the overall state of public infrastructure in the province.

Something is clearly going wrong Premier Makhura, and it needs to be fixed.

We call on the Gauteng provincial government to:

1. Fix Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital as soon as possible, and reopen critical wards, particularly the casualty ward, immediately. Ensure that the hospital is safe, functional and that fire hazard protection measures are in place;
2. Convene a joint government and civil society oversight team to monitor the progress of the repair work, and the budgets and procurement processes involved;
3. Make public all previous and upcoming procurement information related to the refurbishment of the hospital;
4. Finalise and publicly release the forensic report into the April 2021 fire;
5. Request a presidential proclamation for the Special Investigating Unit to investigate all contracts in the last two years by the Gauteng Department of Infrastructure Development;
6. Encourage those with information from within government departments or the hospital to come forward, and provide these sources with adequate whistleblower protection;
7. As committed to by the Gauteng provincial government, ensure that all Covid-19 expenditure disclosure reports are published, including outstanding reports from January 2021 onwards;
8. Ensure the safety of medical, cleaning and admin staff, as well as patients at Charlotte Maxeke Hospital who have been parking outside the hospital with reports of car break ins. Provide alternative, safe parking;
9. Provide additional capacity and budgets to surrounding hospitals to reduce the burden on already overworked healthcare professionals; and
10. We would kindly request response on these issues by 1 February 2022.

Premier Makhura, tomorrow (21 February 2022), you will deliver the State of the Province Address. We urge you to assure residents of Gauteng that its provincial government will get the job done, in a manner that is both efficient and corruption free.

We hope that the words attributed to the struggle icon after whom the hospital is named – Charlotte Maxeke – can actually be embodied by government: “This work is not for yourselves; kill that spirit of self and do not live above your people, but live with them...”.

--

Issued by: The Defend our Democracy Campaign

--

For media enquiries, contact:

Duduetsang Mmeti

Communications Officer

078 088 9294