

Johannesburg fire: Ramaphosa calls for action against illegal occupations

 By [Carien du Plessis](#)

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President Cyril Ramaphosa on Saturday urged authorities to enforce regulations preventing city residents from unlawfully occupying apartment blocks, after scores died in a fire in a Johannesburg building that was occupied illegally.



The fire, which killed more than 70 people, has highlighted a housing crisis in a city that is one of the world's most unequal and where poverty and unemployment are widespread.

"Local government has to enforce the laws," Ramaphosa said at an ANC event.

"This has given us a wake-up call, and I have said that our cities and municipalities must now pay attention to how people live. We do encourage people to live in the inner city ...but we need to do it in accordance with our laws."

The apartment block is owned by municipal authorities, but officials said it was "invaded and hijacked" by unknown groups.

Johannesburg fire: 73 killed in apartment block reported occupied by homeless

Carien du Plessis and Alexander Winning 31 Aug 2023





Government officials have said some of those who died may have been renting from, or were being extorted by, criminal gangs in the so-called "hijacked buildings" syndicates.

Municipal officials have said efforts to evict residents in illegally occupied buildings are often hamstrung by court orders stopping the evictions.

Ramaphosa said he has asked government ministers to look into ways of enforcing laws without violating people's rights.

The gutted building is linked to Apartheid-era government where it served as a *dompas* or passbook collection station to allow black South Africans to access white-owned areas of the city.

Ramaphosa said he collected his passbook at the building about 50 years ago, when he worked in the city.

ABOUT CARIEN DU PLESSIS

After spending her student days at political rallies, campus newspapers, and in lecture halls, and after an extended overseas working holiday, Carien du Plessis started newspaper reporting in 2003, pissing off (the issue of female dogs apply here) and even pleasing some of her subjects. In 2011 she crossed the floor to work for the Daily Maverick and in November 2011 she became senior political reporter at City Press. Follow her on Twitter at @carienduplessis.

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