



MEDIA RELEASE

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AMAZON HQ DEVELOPER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUSPENSION OF WORKERS' CONTRACTS, NOT ACTIVISTS

SAFTU CONDEMNS SCAPEGOATING OF ACTIVISTS BY THE PRIVATE DEVELOPER

SAFTU notes with grave concern the means by which Khoi, San, environmental and civic activists are being blamed for the consequences of a private developer's decision. Some 750 construction workers had their short-term contracts suspended when the High Court halted a mega-development that would have housed Amazon's African headquarters in Cape Town at the Liesbeek River Club, a site of precious indigenous heritage.

A High Court interdict was granted to the Goringhaicona Khoi Khoi Traditional Indigenous Council, in partnership with the Observatory Civic Association, and the court noted that it was the developer (Liesbeek Leisure Property Trust) who took on the risk of continuing construction in the face of pending legal action from indigenous groups.

Formal objections to commercial development have been lodged for years by Khoi and San groups, who have remained steadfast against any form of commercial alteration to the site, due to its pre-eminent heritage properties, its historical, cultural and spiritual value, and its environmental sensitivity. According to the recent judgement, the developer, Liesbeek Leisure Property Trust (LLPT), [has failed to adequately consult Khoi and San groups](#) before embarking on this [staggeringly lucrative project](#).

Predictably, workers are being forced to pay the harshest price for the greed and recklessness of private capital. Rather than accept responsibility for its failure to adequately consult indigenous groups before embarking on the construction phase of this risky enterprise, the developer is choosing to lay the blame of its failures at the feet of the activists and indigenous groups who opposed the project. They continue to attempt to appeal the court's decision while simultaneously forcing workers to bear the consequences of the their own negligence.

Similar scapegoating tactics have been deployed by employers in the past in order to escape accountability for their own failures. Trade unions and union members are often blamed by employers for non-payment of wages during strikes when it is employers



themselves who refuse to pay the salaries. Employers use this tactic as a form of punishment for engaging in collective bargaining – in this way, unions are portrayed as an enemy of the people when it is the employers who are causing the suffering at hand.

Today, San and Khoi communities remain woefully underrepresented and marginalised in South African society. The myriad crimes perpetrated against indigenous people have never been adequately acknowledged, addressed or atoned for – from the horrors of Dutch and British colonialism, which brought centuries of war, slavery and genocide, to apartheid's dehumanising race classification, humiliation and displacement. Present-day black construction workers, who have suffered the same brutalities and must scrape by to feed their families, are similarly marginalised under a racist capitalist system of exploitation and dehumanisation, and are routinely underpaid while working under unsafe conditions.

The black working class is not the enemy of marginalised indigenous Khoi and San groups, who are merely fighting for their fundamental right to dignity and respect. The reality is that both of these overlapping demographics are the victims of an ongoing system of racist brutality that seeks to dispossess, dehumanise and exploit them for the material gain of a small minority.

This matter cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the complicity of the City of Cape Town and Western Cape Provincial Government in signing off on a disastrous development that defies common sense, [according to its own environmental experts and city planners](#). This points to the systemic corruption and the undue influence of foreign direct investment in the City of Cape Town.

The promise of tax revenue to the City in exchange for attractive parcels of real estate, such as those on Bromwell Street, has long been at the root of violent evictions, gentrification and the displacement of working class families. The failure of the City's governing bodies to take accountability for this style of corruption is fundamentally unscrupulous. Indeed, it is telling that one of the directors of LLPT is a *bona fide* agent of gentrification, who [cruelly displaced 28 working class families in 2016](#) to make way for his bourgeois emporium known as The Biscuit Mill.

Finally, SAFTU notes the deafening silence of Amazon as the 'anchor tenant'. As the world's largest company, Amazon's role in this conflict is that of the development's guarantor, with the promise of premium rental income to the developers for years to come. The company had several alternative options to locate their headquarters, which



raises several questions about their adamance in choosing this controversial site. Given the company's record against workers, black and indigenous communities and marginalised people around the world, this is hardly surprising.

We insist that the developer refrains from peddling false information and, instead, engages with the affected workers in attempts to remunerate them in a fair and equitable manner, given that they have been forced to carry the weight of the developer's own negligence. We further urge all parties responsible for this scandalous turn of events, including the developer, the City and the provincial government, and the anchor tenant, to respect the rights of indigenous groups and to refrain from scapegoating others for their own mistakes.

Statement issued on behalf of SAFTU by General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi:

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