

16 December 2015

Dear Masi petitioners,

A resident in our valley, Adv. Paul Hoffman, of the Institute for Accountability, wrote attached piece as a vision of what Masi might become. At the end of attached piece he suggests you visit his website to have a look at the 'Light House' - an example of an innovative alternate form of housing.

Season's greetings!

Horst & Christine

The Masiphumelele Waterfront rises from the ashes

On Sunday, 29 November 2015 about 800 informal dwellings in Masiphumelele were razed to the ground in a huge fire fanned by a strong south-easter. Two lives were lost in the conflagration and the future of many more looks bleak as greater Cape Town winds down for the festive season. Assuming an average of 5 persons per dwelling, some 4000 souls have been displaced by the fire.

Fires of this nature are entirely foreseeable and occur with frightening repetitiveness in informal settlements around Cape Town. They threaten the lives and other human rights of those living in fire prone areas. The prospect of successfully fighting the fires is severely hampered by the densely packed, highly inflammable and haphazardly designed layout of informal settlements. Aerial bombardment of flames is impossible at night, and most often the shack fires start at night. Fire trucks are too large to get access and fire hydrants are not installed in many areas served by no more than a communal tap and toilet as well as an illegal electricity connection.

The human settlements authorities at local, provincial and national level do not have any pro-active strategy for preventing the loss of life and property that accompanies these disasters apart from the “re-blocking” of informal settlements that affords better access by emergency services vehicles. The slow rate at which re-blocking is carried out leaves a lot to be desired. The informal dwellings destroyed due to official inertia hardly qualify as “access to adequate housing” which is a