

21 December 2015.

Dear Petitioners,

Thank you for your responses to the previous mailings on the Masi crises. They all speak to the need for intervention, steps that go beyond the business-as-usual, and the building of relationship and trust across the divide in our valley. What this adds up to I am uncertain of but a valley-wide consultation with all stakeholders is one option. But meetings must not replace the need for urgency.

I was asked to circulate the article below (not by its author, Prof. Andy Dawes) because of the points he makes in regard to the demand for solutions.

For your information: A number of people from Masi appear in the Simonstown court this morning. They had not been charged by last night but have been in custody. Many people in Masi see this as an attack on their efforts to get the police to do their job against crime and drugs.

Yours sincerely,

Horst

The people of Masi have been betrayed

OLIVER Goldsmith's 1770 poem *The Deserted Village*, written in late 18th century England, provides us with a timeless image of the damage to the social fabric of rampant wealth accumulation, a neglectful government, and the ravages of poverty.

He wrote: "Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, / Where wealth accumulates, and men decay..."

Goldsmith's words resonate with me as I reflect on yet another Masi fire disaster; another promise of "re-blocking", more charity, more housing kits and blankets, the irony of fire-retardant paint delivered after the fire - impossible to deliver earlier due to violence, we understand.

But most of all I reflect on broken promises, on missed opportunities and on the rage we have seen in recent times.

Those more fortunate than most in Masi (as I am) should not be surprised that frustration boils over and when it does, it affects all who live in this valley. I ask myself why has it been so difficult for this city to address the fundamental structural conditions that underlie the pattern of disasters that have beset Masi since the early 1990s?

I am saddened and angered by the latest preventable tragedy.

Systemic solutions are needed as was recognised in the "No More Charity Appeal" launched in January last year and addressed to the premier and the mayor.

I was one of more than 900 signatories and part of the delegation that participated in engagements with local government over the following nine months.

The recent disaster gave me cause to write this letter in my personal capacity and it recounts what happened to the appeal - or rather, what did not. It argues continuing charity, fire after fire, is not the way forward.

Significant and fundamental changes to the living conditions and livelihoods of wetland residents were required that would reduce the likeli-

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hood of disasters, death and risk to both adults and children.

Three key steps were recommended:

- Ensure access for emergency vehicles and basic services, in particular by "re-blocking" of shacks so as to create access roads for emergency vehicles and basic services.

- Provide a second access road: an extension of Houmoed Road to Kommetjie Road would enable emergency access and easier movement of residents.

Specifically we requested that a second access road be built last year, a condition prior to building government housing (phase 4).

- Conduct a land and infrastructure audit to identify space and facilities that will be required for the creation of new, diverse villages.

So long as the overcrowding in the informal areas continued, the risks to health and safety would remain.

Premier Helen Zille responded to the appeal by inviting the delegation to present their case at a meeting of the human settlements political steering committee in February 2015.

She agreed all the issues warranted the city's urgent attention and should be prioritised. The city was charged with establishing an action plan.

Monthly report-backs were to be held to track progress and feedback to

affected Masiphumelele residents would be provided on a regular basis by councillors, and city officials.

Over the course of last year, the Masi delegation engaged with a task team set up by city officials.

Meetings were supposed to be held monthly, but these became erratic. The last formal meeting initiated by the city was held on September 26, last year.

A community survey to assess housing needs and an audit of land availability for housing in the surrounding areas were to be undertaken.

We were promised the findings.

There is silence too on the future of Solole land just opposite Masi and purchased by the city last year.

The only concrete and very important progress I know of is the commencement of the extension of Houmoed Road to provide the much needed second access road to Masi.

The city reneged on its commitments to the group.

As an outsider to Masi, I had a taste of the sense of the resentment and futility that must be the daily experience of those in that community who in good faith attempt to broker solutions with the city. I am fully aware that addressing the issues raised by the Masi appeal is complex.

Anyone who knows the area will be aware of political, ethnic and national divisions and of the criminal actors who take advantage of vulnerability.

Goldsmith's poem still speaks to city officials and political representatives: "Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen, who survey / The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay, / 'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand / Between a splendid and a happy land."

It is time for councillors and officials to rebuild my confidence that they are indeed to be trusted servants of all the people of this valley.

Andy Dawes
Clovally