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MEDIA RELEASE BY MEC MAGGIE GOVENDER, MPL

RE: - UMLAZI HOUSING PROJECT

There has been extensive media speculation and conjecture concerning the Umlazi Housing Project in which fingers have been pointed and blame shifted in every direction. This matter has been in the public domain for some time and we can only now state the facts and the measures to fix the problems.

I acknowledge the important role that the media plays as the Fourth Estate in informing the public and enabling informed debate, and I respect those in the media who have, in turn, respected the position that I am compelled to take in order to ensure that the public is informed on facts rather than speculation, suspicion and innuendo – much of them drawn from our historic prejudices.

While media speculation continued, information was being gathered, and I instructed the National Home Builders Registration Council (NHBRC) to conduct a full investigation of the Umlazi Project. The NHBRC is a statutory body that regulates adherence to stipulated standards for residential housing so that dwellings are habitable and safe.

The NHBRC has now provided me with their report and recommendations, and I am now informed of the facts of the matter. The audit of the Umlazi Project involved a forensic investigation of the structural integrity of 1 200 houses built with a subsidy from the Provincial Housing Department. This included individual examinations of each unit and reports on their conformance to statutory construction standards.

The NHBRC report states that there is evidence of poor workmanship when a complete assessment of the structural integrity of the structure to serve as a dwelling is done. This, the report suggests, may also be as a result of a lack of qualified supervision of the workers involved in the construction and should not have been passed by the inspectors.

Furthermore, other design flaws have been noted where construction has not met the site plan density requirements and where inadequate stormwater drainage has been provided for.

The NHBRC has offered to provide training to inspectors of houses being constructed and completed.

The NHBRC has agreed that the houses, once rectified to the required standards, will qualify for the NHBRC warranty and can therefore be transferred to the home owner.

The meeting held with eThekweni today was to discuss the report of the NHBRC. Here, I must stress that housing delivery occurs through a chain comprising prospective home dwellers, contractors, municipal authorities, provincial government and national government. The chain broke. We must fix the system. We can't play "Weakest Link" games. Here I wish to iterate that finger pointing and blame shifting does not help the recipient of defective products. Overseeing the quality of houses being delivered will create the necessary pressure in the delivery chain to enable us to deliver on our marching orders to deliver human settlements.

In summary there is going to be a set of actions that will see this problem fixed:-

- The rectification of abodes that have been identified as being defective;
- The registration of these abodes to qualify for the warranty from the NHBRC;
- The integration of the delivery chain;
- Making the projects embarked upon compliant to the stipulated building standards;
- Holding all parties to account for their responsibilities.
- Where dereliction of duty has occurred action will be taken.

I am pleased to announce that I and the Chief Executive Officer of the NHBRC, Mr. Mashinini have signed a Memorandum of Understanding and a Service Level Agreement. This is the result of detailed discussions that have been held between departmental officials, the NHBRC and myself, over the past two months.

These agreements signify a mutual understanding and a common commitment to ensuring quality products for beneficiaries of low-income subsidized housing. I wish to thank the Department and the NHBRC's staff for their commitment in securing this common ground – which will be ultimately beneficial for our Province.

Today's statement encompasses discussions with the e-Thekwini municipality and as such represent a strengthening of the delivery chain.

Issued by MEC Maggie Govender, MPL, this 16th day of April 2010.

MEC for Human Settlements and Public Works, KwaZulu-Natal.