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**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**Issued by:** Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC), Development Action Group (DAG), Legal Resources Centre (LRC), and Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU).

## **Civil society organisations call for the release of under-utilised military land to combat Cape Town's housing crisis**

Today a group of civil society organisations and academics urged President Cyril Ramaphosa to immediately release three large, well-located and vacant (or under-used) military sites in Cape Town for the development of low-income housing. The three pieces of nationally-owned land - Ysterplaat, Wingfield and Youngsfield – have the potential to combat Cape Town's affordable housing crisis and alleviate the most harmful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has driven many into homelessness. By releasing the sites, the national government could make room for up to 67,000 low-income households in Cape Town, answering a decades-long call on national government to address the gross spatial inequalities in the city.

Twenty-six years after apartheid, Cape Town remains deeply divided along race and class lines. State-subsidised housing has done little to redress this entrenched spatial apartheid, with housing delivery failing to keep pace with the considerable backlog. This has led to a housing crisis, in terms of which hundreds of thousands of poor and working class families have been forced to live in peripheral townships, backyard shacks and informal settlements. These areas have limited access to basic services, schools generally perform worse, gang violence is rife, substance abuse is more common, and social amenities such as hospitals and clinics are difficult to access. The poor and working class also spend a disproportionate component of their income and time on unreliable transport – up to 45% of their incomes according to the City of Cape Town's own estimates. These poor living conditions, coupled with high rates of unemployment, trap the poor and working class in a cycle of structural poverty.

And the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated these existing inequalities. The socio-economic impact of the pandemic and consequent economic recession has dramatically increased the rates of unemployment, severely diminished incomes and led to increased rates of hunger - all borne disproportionately by the poor and working class. Those living on the outskirts of Cape Town have also suffered the brunt of the COVID-19 health impacts: Over-crowded and poorly serviced areas with high public transport use, particularly on the Cape Flats, were hardest hit. Living on the urban periphery means being dependent on public transport, living in crowded conditions, sharing basic service facilities, and having to wait in long queues to access healthcare – all of which increases the risk of exposure to the deadly COVID-19 virus. The rise in the number of land occupations in Cape Town and other cities, soon after the imposition of the national lockdown, is an example of the extent to which the need for land has reached a breaking-point.

The state – at all levels – therefore has a legal, moral and public health obligation to expedite the release of well-located public land to enable the urgent development of affordable housing. In this context, Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC), Development Action

Group (DAG), Legal Resources Centre (LRC), Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU) and Professor Vanessa Watson (Professor of City and Regional Planning at the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics at the University of Cape Town) urge the national government to release these three large and exceptionally well-located parcels of under-used military land.

Over the last decade these sites have been identified by various state officials - at all levels of government - as key parcels of public land that should be released for the development of affordable housing as they offer a unique opportunity to simultaneously address the housing crisis and promote socio-spatial justice in Cape Town. Yet despite these calls, they continue to lie vacant and under-utilised.

In our submission to the President, the National Coronavirus Command Council, the Minister of Public Works, Minister of Human Settlements and Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, we have identified how the state could release these parcels of land and advocated for the sites to be incrementally developed through a “package of plans” that already exist in the housing programmes. We have included schematic plans for the development of each sites, along with careful analyses of the opportunities and constraints of each site, and proposed guiding principles and implementation imperatives that should underpin any development of the sites. In our detailed submission, we have therefore presented a compelling case for why these sites should be released and how to practically do so.

Given the scale of the current housing crisis in Cape Town, we are requesting a meeting with the Presidency and related government departments in order to share our ideas and motivate for the release of these parcels of land.

We call on the state to take seriously the call for the rapid release of these three pieces of land for the development of low-income housing in Cape Town. The failure to release this well-located and under-utilised public land despite many calls to do so over past four decades – is an injustice. The poor and working class have, and will continue, to bear the brunt of this inaction. It has taken a global pandemic to bring our society to its knees - and the time has come for real action and meaningful change.

The submission addressed to the President, the National Corona Command Council and various Ministers has been endorsed by the following social justice organisations, social movements and community-based organisations:

- Abahlali baseMjondolo
- Afesis Coplan
- Bishop Lavis Backyarders Forum
- Bonteheuwel Ratepayers and Tenants Association
- Community Organisation and Resource Centre (CORC)
- Delft Backyarders
- Development Action Group (DAG)
- Dullah Omar Institute
- Eerste Rivier Backyarders Forum
- Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDUP)
- Gatesville Tenant Committee
- Informal Settlement Network (ISN)
- Institute for Poverty Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS)
- Khayelitsha Peacebuilding Team
- Kraaifontein Economic Drivers
- Land and Accountability Research Centre (LARC)
- Langa Residents Ratepayers Association
- Legal Resources Centre (LRC)
- Madalay Montclair Business Forum
- Maitland Garden Village Housing Forum
- Mitchell's Plain United Residents Association
- Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU)
- Peoples Environment Planning (PEP)
- Phuhlisani
- Planact
- Reclaim the City
- Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI)
- Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute
- Ubuhle Bakha Ubuhle (UBU)
- uTshani Fund
- Women Zone

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