

THE PEOPLES' WATER FORUM



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President Cyril Ramaphosa
The Presidency,
Private Bag x1000,
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0001
Email: PresidentRSA@presidency.gov.za

10 February 2026

Dear President Ramaphosa,

WATER CRISIS IN THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG – A NATIONAL DISASTER

We write to you with urgency regarding the deepening water crisis in the City of Johannesburg, which has reached a point where decisive national intervention is now required. The People's Water Forum is a community-led forum of activists, residents and water experts who have organised protests, marches, and memorandums demanding action from the City of Johannesburg. The endorsements below establish who we are as a collective.

Large parts of Johannesburg continue to experience prolonged water outages, collapsing pressure, and unpredictable supply. Residents across many suburbs are experiencing water going off for days at a time, or very low pressure for extended periods. Community groups have reported that places like Kensington, Emmarentia, Melville and Westdene have had outages lasting up to about 20 days. Residents, schools, clinics, small businesses and care facilities are bearing the daily consequences of a failing system. This is no longer an inconvenience - it is a public health emergency and a threat to economic activity, social stability, and human dignity.

Water tanks should never become the norm. They are meant to be an emergency measure, not a substitute for a functioning water system. As this crisis deepens, the way tanks are being used is actively making things worse. In informal settlements especially, government has to move beyond tankers and invest in sustainable water supply, including properly planned boreholes and reliable local systems. You cannot run a city or protect public health through water trucks.

The crisis, unlike in the Western Cape, is not the result of weather conditions alone. It is driven by chronic infrastructure neglect, massive water losses, governance failures at Johannesburg Water, and weak accountability across the City's water value chain. Despite repeated warnings from civil society, engineers, and residents, meaningful corrective action has been slow, fragmented, and opaque. On 1 November 2025, we raised the alarm through a huge protest at the City Council Chambers.

Mr President, the City of Johannesburg has demonstrated that it is unable, on its own, to stabilise and reform the water system at the scale and speed required. The Presidential Joburg

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Working Groups have also not been able to create the change we need. We therefore call on your office to urgently:

1. Declare the Johannesburg water crisis a **national disaster** so urgent action and necessary funding can be unlocked immediately.
2. Appoint an independent, technically competent **intervention team** with clear powers and timelines. There are too many role players currently working out of sync to address the crisis.
3. Ensure **transparent reporting** on water losses, infrastructure failures, and remedial actions. Unreliable and contradictory messaging from Joburg Water, Rand Water, DWS etc is creating frustration among residents.
4. Protect residents by prioritising equitable and permanent water access for **vulnerable communities**, clinics, schools and care facilities.
5. Provide a consistent and transparent engagement platform that **civil society has access** to and can engage openly.
6. **Strengthen and support Joburg Water's existing teams** with skills, funding and leadership support to fix the system fast.
7. Provide **emergency national funding** that reflects Johannesburg's size, growth and importance to the country's economy, and that the funding is ring-fenced for water and sanitation
8. Address the **confusion and lack of collaboration between national, provincial and city authorities** so responsibility is clear and action is coordinated.
9. Introduce **fair and clearly explained water restrictions**, developed in consultation with communities, to protect basic supply for all.

Notwithstanding the actions above, we propose a commission of inquiry made up of all sectors of society – including civil society - to investigate the systemic collapse of water and sanitation provision in the City of Joburg. Ensure that such a Commission of Inquiry is time-bound, focused on solutions, and does not delay repairs and maintenance. As such this must be a parallel process.

Water is a constitutional right. The continued failure to secure reliable access undermines public trust and erodes confidence in government at all levels. Without urgent intervention, the crisis will worsen, with severe consequences for health, safety, and economic recovery.

We urge you to act decisively and visibly. Johannesburg cannot afford further delay.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ferrial Adam', written in a cursive style.

Dr Ferrial Adam
074-181-3197

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CORRESPONDENCE COPIED TO:

- Minister of Water and Sanitation, Minister Pemmy Majodina
- Rand Water CEO, Mr Siphosiso Mosai
- Minister of COGTA, Minister Velenkosini Hlabisa
- Premier of Gauteng, Panyaza Lesufi
- Mayor of City of Johannesburg, Mayor Dada Morero
- CEO of Joburg Water, Mr Ntshavheni Mukwevho

ENDORSED BY:

(Add Endorsements here)

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