

“SWEATSHOPS” / “WORK-HOUSES”

The conditions under which children and their parents live



**CROWN BUILDING, Carlisle Street,
Durban Photograph, Courtesy of KwaZulu
Natal Independent Newspapers**

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Durban sweatshops defy laws

Mary Papayya

New municipal legislation has done nothing to stop the exploitation of about 10 500 workers crammed into sweatshops in Durban's central business district by unscrupulous landlords and businessmen, say human rights activists.

“People work and live in over-crowded conditions with no ventilation. They labour as slaves to pay exorbitant rentals to a landlord who at times is also their employer,” said Sayed Iqbal Mohammed, chairman of the Organisation of Civic Rights (OCR).

He urged the municipality to clamp down on “unscrupulous and greedy landlords and owners” who let vacant or commercial properties for a combination of business and residential use.

Nearly 30 buildings house mostly women workers who use their sewing skills to eke out a living.

They perform CMT – cut, make and trim – factory orders for leading chain stores.

The workers are afraid of speaking to the landlord or the media. The OCR has now taken up their plight.

Only a handful of landlords were negotiating with the OCR to rectify the situation, Mohammed said.

Property owners, or slumlords, do not carry out maintenance, repairs or renovations, and many of the buildings have no toilets or washrooms.

There are also children on some of the premises.

City officials said the “illegal workhouses” would be snuffed out.

“We will enforce and serve notices for illegal workhouses to stop operations, unless they can meet certain standards and become regularised,” said city manager Michael Sutcliffe.

The businesses had to comply with “stipulated conditions”.

**Organisation of Civic Rights (OCR) “Sweatshops” Project
Durban South Africa (2002 – 2004)**

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