

South Africa

Mayor blames poor for storm destruction

Cape Town is being battered by extreme storms. But its mayor is blaming poor people instead of climate change.

Marché Arends

Violent storms are wreaking havoc in South Africa's Western Cape province, but for Cape Town's mayor, Geordin Hill-Lewis it's just another opportunity to ventilate his brand of politics: sticking it to the poor.

During a visit to Dunoon, a settlement on the city's outskirts which has been battered by the severe weather, Hill-Lewis told *TimesLive* that it was "an important time to make a point about illegal occupation".

"Illegal occupants", he said, build homes atop infrastructure and obstruct access to pipes and drains, impeding the work of city officials trying to clear the debris. He plans to start legal proceedings to remove such people and their houses.

Hill-Lewis is a member of the centre-



Cape of Storms: Howling winds and torrential rains destroyed thousands of buildings in Cape Town. Photo: Dwayne Senior/Bloomberg via Getty Images

right Democratic Alliance, now part of South Africa's ruling coalition. The party has governed the Western Cape for 15 years and has repeatedly come under fire for policies and conduct critics say favour the rich.

In tearing down houses, Hill-Lewis would further the impact of the unprecedented levels of rainfall and gale-force winds that in past weeks have damaged at least 35,000 structures (including homes and schools) and displaced 4,500 people.

Various non-profits, in partnership with local government, have distributed thousands of meals and blankets to those affected by the damage.

On Friday, the South African Weather Service warned that more cold fronts, damaging winds and disruptive rain were expected on Sunday. ■