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Democracy in Colour calls for the immediate withdrawal of police from the Flemington and North Melbourne public housing towers in hard lockdown

On Saturday afternoon, the Victorian Government announced a hard lockdown of nine public housing towers in Melbourne. Racial and economic justice advocacy organisation Democracy in Colour stands in solidarity with the 3,000 tenants in these towers and is calling for the immediate removal of police enforcement during this hard lockdown.

National Co-Director Tim Lo Surdo says, "This hard lockdown of public housing residents is unjustifiably cruel. This isn't a public health response, it's explicitly targeting people of colour and working class communities.

"This lockdown means 3,000 people aren't allowed to leave their homes even though they often can't work from home and can't afford not to work. And it means putting police outside the doors of people who have been targeted, abused and over-policed by authorities their entire lives.

"Many are living with trauma, mental health conditions, and they're disproportionately Black and people of colour. Many of the units are overcrowded and in need of repair. The communities living in them have been racially profiled over many years by the same police force that is now making them prisoners in their own homes.

"The selective lockdowns of Melbourne suburbs with high numbers of residents of colour smacks of racial scapegoating. If we were talking about predominantly white apartment blocks, would we be seeing a similar punitive response?

"There is no doubt urgent public health measures are required to contain COVID-19, but this terrifying militarised response will not stop the spread. It will only harm in the long term, creating more public health consequences for residents, eroding community trust, and creating division.

"It's telling that the Government's first response was 500 armed police instead of ensuring basic essentials like food, healthcare, multilingual information and access to social and housing workers were provided.

"The Victorian Government must immediately withdraw police from these public housing towers, and guarantee that any future emergency lockdowns will not be enforced by police," said Mr Lo Surdo.

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Democracy in Colour is a national racial and economic justice organisation led by people of colour. It runs campaigns that tackle structural racism and build the power of people of colour to shape the critical issues that affect our lives.