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Govt urged: 'Halt this destruction'

13 Nov 2009

Thando Mgaga

BRUNTVILLE residents in Mooi River yesterday called on the government to intervene and stop the destruction of hostel blocks, which was allegedly ordered by an ANC ward councillor.

The Inkatha Freedom Party, the opposition in the Mpfana Municipality, and hostel dwellers who spoke to The Witness on condition of anonymity for fear of being victimised, said that hostel blocks were damaged because the councillor, Sifiso Mkhize, had said that they were occupied by IFP supporters. They alleged that Mkhize sent his bodyguards to deface the hostel blocks with sledgehammers.

About 24 units of three hostel blocks do not have roofs, windows are broken and the adjoining walls have been destroyed.

Hostel residents said that some of the roofs and windows were destroyed while they were still inside the hostel units, adding that Mkhize's bodyguards did not allow them time to remove their belongings before commencing with the vandalism.

When The Witness visited the hostels yesterday, there were shoes, toys, beer bottles, mattresses, curtains and pieces of furniture squashed under the debris of the roofs and bricks that had caved in during the wrecking.

The hostel dwellers allege Mkhize is trying to chase away IFP supporters.

Mkhize's bodyguards reportedly said that most of the residents are "tourists" in Bruntville and they should go back to where they come from.

The residents claimed that the bodyguards threatened to shoot them if they did not move from the hostels.

One of the residents said that most hostel dwellers are from the surrounding rural areas and are staying in the hostel to be closer to their workplaces.

"However, [Mkhize's bodyguards] told us to go back to our homes because they don't want us there."

They told The Witness that the situation is tense and that politically linked violence is brewing.

"Most of us are security guards who are issued with firearms at work. [The bodyguards] have threatened to shoot and kill us and we might use our own work guns to defend ourselves," said one resident. They said that the government should act immediately to put a stop to this.

Women residents said the hostel is not safe, adding that when there are parties in the nearby township, there are revellers who come to the hostel and terrorise them.

"In December it gets worse. We are attacked every time there is a party in the township. They (revellers) ... break down our doors and beat us up.

"We usually call the police, but we get little assistance from them. We have resorted to running and hiding in the nearby bushes and trenches," said a female hostel dweller.

The hostel dwellers also complained about the lack of service delivery provisions, saying they don't have access to water, toilets and electricity. They claimed that electricity was shut off in 2007, and that for cooking, they resort to indoor fires.

Police spokeswoman Inspector Joey Jeevan said a delegation from the hostel told the police of the demolition incident and was advised to come forward and formally report the matter so that it can be investigated.

Mpfana Municipality mayor Mncedisi Mthethwa held a meeting with the hostel residents on Wednesday. He said no resolution was taken by the municipality to have the hostel demolished.

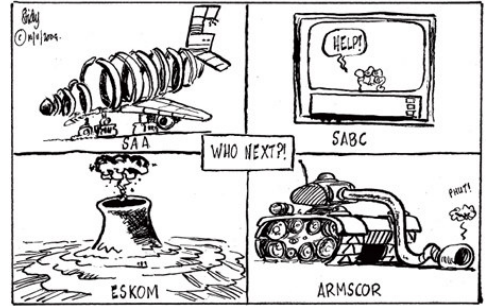
"Those who did this [demolition] are not acting on the council mandate and they must be reported to the police," said Mthethwa, adding that he was informed by residents that Mkhize's bodyguards were allegedly the demolishers.

An IFP councillor, Mthembeni Majola, said his party will organise a march in the next few days to call for the demolition of the hostel to stop.

The ANC told The Witness yesterday that it will take steps against the demolishers. The ANC secretary in the Moses Mabhida region, Supa Zuma, said the matter will be investigated as a matter of urgency.

Mkhize told The Witness on Monday that he is not behind the demolition.

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Will the situation at Eskom improve with Jacob Maroga out?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

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