

Mlaba lies to the poor

Durban, KZN: Today, Mayor Obed Mlaba was scheduled to have met representatives of the Abahlali Base Mjondolo at the Pema Ridge settlement in Reservoir Hills. Mayor Mlaba had, as had been agreed, been faxed a list of questions to be answered at this meeting (see annexe 1). People across all the 14 settlements affiliated to Abahlali Base Mjondolo were eagerly anticipating this meeting. But Mlaba's office has cancelled the meeting (see annexe 2).

This is not the first time that the municipal authorities have raised the expectations of Durban's poorest residents, only to betray them. Indeed, meetings have been cancelled nine times over the past two months. And there has been ten years of broken promises and empty rhetoric before that. Every settlement that is a member of the Abahlali Base Mjondolo has been promised land for nearly a decade, with no end in sight to the promising.

"We're ready to negotiate, but Mlaba is ready to lie," said S'bu Zikode, the chairman of the Abahlali Base Mjondolo. Referring to a recent march illegally banned by City Manager, Dr Mike Sutcliffe, Zikode continues, "Our march was banned, and now the negotiations are banned. Must we jump into the ocean?"

Zikode suggests that the upcoming municipal elections have much to do with Mlaba's behaviour. "Their aim is to keep the ball rolling until March 1, and then they will take the ball away."

Mlaba's representations in the press have suggested that an end is in sight to the plight of those in informal settlements, with the announcement of a major deal with the Durban colonial landlords, Moreland. "He goes to the press, and talks about billions of rand. But when they send officials to us we discover that there's no such thing. Mlaba wants to look good in public, but he fails to keep his own words."

"We've met a number of times with the deputy city manager, and we had questions about the Moreland deal, our own settlements, and other land we might move to. We were all looking forward to it. We were expecting every one of our questions about housing to be answered – when, how, how many, what assurance do we have that you're telling the truth?"

The Abahlali Base Mjondolo is frustrated at the municipality. "What must we do for Mlaba to honour the Abahlali and honour his own words? We are ready to listen, we are ready to act. We don't mind getting into the street again. We're being encouraged to do this. The next time Mbeki wants to know about the outsiders who are making us march, he must ask Mlaba. No one else but him is making us do this. He must know we're busy rolling up our sleeves to go back into the street. Because that's the only language he understands," says Zikode. "We are calling upon the government at the provincial and national level to intervene to help the municipality to get these questions answered to Abahlali."

Adds Zikode, “Everyone’s looking towards Christmas, when everyone is enjoying life. Now Mlaba has turned our Christmas very sour, it is clear, as a punishment. I think it’s human to be respected, we shouldn’t have to beg.”

“Where are the human rights organisations, the commissions and NGOs, when Mlaba is using the resources of the state to oppress us? When are they going to respond when the rich men are fooling around with the poor? How many Mhlengi Khumalo’s must die in the shack fires? It is out of order that we must rot in the shacks like this. We must stand up.”

Contact details

Mnikelo Ndabankulu, Foreman Road Development Committee, 073 565 6241

Lungisani Jama, Foreman Road Development Committee, 082 259 5443

Philani Dlamini, Foreman Road Development Committee, 072 962 9312

Fikile Nkosi, Pema Ridge Development Committee, 084 250 1446

Moses Mncwango, Jadhu Place Development Committee, 076 225 0260

S'bu Zikode, Chair, Abahlali base Mjondolo, 083 547 0474

Annexe 1:

Questions that were faxed to Mayor Mlaba from Abahlali Base Mjondolo as per the Mayor's instructions

Abahlali base mjondolo
c/o Mr S'bu Zikode
Kennedy Road Development Committee
PO Box 26
Umgeni Road
4098

Tel: (031) 269 1228

Fax: (031) 269 3749

Cell: 083 547 0474

TO: HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR THE HONORABLE OBED MLABA

FROM: ABAHLALI BASE MJONDOLO

RE: QUESTIONS FOR THE MAYOR'S VISIT TO PEMARY RIDGE SETTLEMENT

Date: Sunday, 27 November 2005

Number of pages including this one: 3

Dear Mr. Mlaba

We are very much looking forward to your visit with us at the Pemary Ridge settlement and are very hopeful that this visit will mark a positive way forward for both shack dwellers and the Municipality. We have been asked to prepare some questions for you in advance. We have had extensive discussions with our constituency around the questions that we would like to put to you.

Before we list our key questions we would like to place on record the central principles to which our constituency mandates us to adhere:

1. Central principles of the Abahlali base mjondolo.

- 1.1 There is often more than one family living in one shack and so we need one house per nuclear family and not one house per shack. Houses must be appropriate to family size.
- 1.2 For many people relocation would create serious problems so there have to be as many upgrades as possible in the areas where people currently live. Upgrades where people live are our first priority, developments on nearby lands are our second priority and relocation is our third and lowest priority.

- 1.3 In all instances priority must be given to local labour. Local people should receive training and skills development in order to be able to take advantage of opportunities emerging from new developments. Opportunities for local businesses should also be channelled through local organisations.
- 1.4 In all instances there must be formal arrangements set up for ongoing People's Housing Participation in the planning of developments. Appropriate stakeholder forums should include Abahlali base mJondolo, the Municipality, consultants, developers and contractors.
- 1.5 We need clear time frames and details for all agreements entered into, and questions asked of the municipality.
- 1.6 The demographic data currently being used is outdated and must be updated. We would like new research to be undertaken with extensive public participation.
- 1.7 While the need for adequate housing and services is urgent, so is the need for employment – it would be futile for all concerned if new housing were to result in cut-offs and evictions for families on grounds of inability to pay. Therefore developments need to be accompanied by job creation, and guarantees of protection for the poor against cut-offs and evictions.
- 1.8 We subscribe to the full spectrum of social and economic rights as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which includes, but is not limited to, the right to water, housing, employment, freedom of expression & association, and dignity.

2. Specific questions about the Municipality's planned housing developments

- 2.1 How many houses does the Municipality plan to build?
- 2.2 Where does the Municipality plan to build houses?
- 2.3 When does the Municipality plan to build the houses?
- 2.4. How does the Municipality plan to make sure that all developments are undertaken in a manner that results in formal and ongoing opportunities for people's housing participation?
- 2.5 What plans does the Municipality have to ensure that local labour will be used on these projects and that people will be paid properly and be employed under decent conditions?
- 2.6 What plans does the Municipality have to train shack dwellers with the skills necessary to get work on these projects?
- 2.7 What arrangements will be made with regard to the provision of, and payment for, water, electricity, sanitation, refuse removal and rates in the new developments?
- 2.8 Will there be schools, parks, community halls, youth centres, libraries, clinics, gardens, market places and spaces set aside for sports fields and places of worship in the new developments?
- 2.9 What plans does the Municipality have to ensure that shack dwellers have access to sanitation, refuse removal, water and electricity while they wait for new developments?
- 2.10 What processes will be put in place to identify land in ward 23 and 25, and nearby areas, and for the Municipality to purchase or expropriate this land?

3. The Moreland Development

- 3.1 When will we receive full written details of the deal between Moreland and the Municipality?

- 3.2 How many houses will be built for shack dwellers, and what type of house?
- 3.3 Who will qualify for houses? (What will be the exact requirements for people to get a house?)
- 3.4 How will priority for housing be worked out?
- 3.5 What will happen to people who don't qualify?
- 3.3 What will be the size of the houses?
- 3.5 What will be the size of the plots? Will they be sufficient to grow food on, and will the development support with community gardens, inputs, training and access to markets, the growing of food on these plots?
- 3.6 What arrangements will be made with regard to electricity, water, sanitation and refuse removal?
- 3.7 Will there be schools, parks, community halls, youth centres, libraries, clinics, gardens, market places and spaces set aside for sports fields and places of worship?
- 3.8 What arrangements will be made for public participation in the planning and implementation of this development?
- 3.10 What arrangements will be made to ensure that shack dwellers get work on this development and to provide training for shack dwellers to be able to get work on this development?
- 3.11 What arrangements will be made to subsidise transport from this development to the City? (Trains, buses and taxis)
- 3.12 While we are very excited about the proposal that the new development will not segregate rich and poor we would like to know what plans will be made to ensure that the poor are not treated badly by the rich in the new development. What plans are there to ensure democratic governance of the new development?
- 3.13. Is it not possible to rather use some or all of the money allocated for this project to buy and develop land where people are currently living?

We look forward to welcoming you to the Petary Ridge settlement later this week.

Yours sincerely

S'Bu Zikode
On behalf of Abahlali base Mjondolo

eThekweni Municipality

Fax Transmission

To: Mr Stu Zikode
fax: 569 6003
From: Kama Mahara

Date: 06/12/2005

Message:

Kindly note that the meeting scheduled on 07/12/2005 has been cancelled.

The Mayor is considering the matter
at Council in the first instance
prior to honoring a meeting with
the committee.