

World

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'Black Boers' clear townships by force

South Africa
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Nelson Mandela's successors are driving slumdweller out of their homes at gunpoint and killing those who resist in a violent campaign that human rights groups compare to the evictions of the apartheid era.

Bulldozers are regularly sent to demolish the homes of Durban's poorest communities in President Zuma's home state of KwaZulu Natal. More than 3,000 people have been evicted from their homes in the city's informal settlement Cato Crest this year. At a protest against illegal evictions on Tuesday, slumdweller sang the freedom songs Mr Mandela once led them in and shouted: "Down with the black Boers."

Although the demonstration was peaceful, policemen quietly told its leader, S'bu Zikode: "You have five minutes to disperse the crowd before we start shooting."

Six people have been killed so far this year in Durban while being evicted, 60 have received death threats and 12 of those have been forced into hiding. Sixteen people have been injured, including an elderly woman who had her eye shot out by a rubber bullet.

Richard Pithouse, a Durban-born academic, accuses the ruling African National Congress (ANC) of masterminding the campaign. "The ANC absolutely has to take the blame," he said. "In recent years the ANC has deliberately turned to a much more aggressive mode of policing. Senior politicians use incredibly belligerent rhetoric that presents protest as a crime. It sets the stage for violence."

"There's no question there are all kinds of continuities between the way cities are managed under apartheid and under the ANC... One of the lines



Protesters were ordered to disperse

of continuity is that they think poor people pose a criminal threat to society and the state is responding with violence, even assassination."

Nathi Mngomezulu was shot four times in the stomach while defending his home from a demolition squad on 26 September. In pain and too frightened to return to his neighbourhood in case the police return to finish him off, he spoke yesterday from a hospital bed.

"I went to buy cigarettes and coming back I saw 14 cars near my home. The police were in my house. I knew one of them and I came in and said 'Govender' — that was his name, David Govender. He said 'Don't call me Govender', and shot me four times. Then he and his friends came and picked the cartridges up off the floor. They broke the house and everything in it. I have no shelter, no blanket, no clothes."

Mr Mngomezulu is a leader of Abahlali baseMjondolo, a shack-dwellers' movement that leads resistance against evictions, and said that the policeman bore a grudge against him for that rea-

son. Six days after he was shot, at a protest against evictions, police killed an unarmed 17-year-old girl, Nqobile Nzuza. She was shot in the back and the back of her head.

The police said that they shot in self-defence, but an inquiry has not been opened and the policeman identified by multiple witnesses as her killer has not been suspended.

Mary Rayner, of Amnesty International, said: "There are serious grounds for believing that the police used unlawful and excessive force and have a case to answer."

Some of the shack-dwellers are there illegally, having come to the city to find work. Although the Government builds free houses, supposedly for the poor, they go to ANC supporters or those who can afford a bribe, according to shack-dwellers, community leaders, and academics from Durban.

In many cases, however, the shack-dwellers are in possession of court orders to prevent Land Invasions Unit officials from demolishing their homes.

"Evictions are carried out at gunpoint. You have a court interdict, a piece of paper to say they cannot evict you, but those who are supposed to be custodians of the law just ignore it," Mr Zikode said. "You are dealing with the apartheid mind."

A spokesman for James Nxumalo, the Mayor of Durban, said the slum-dwellers were on private and state land and it was legal to evict them.

He said that he was unaware of the case of Mr Mngomezulu, despite the media attention it has attracted. He said claims that evictions and police brutality were worse than under apartheid were "absolute nonsense", and that allegations that the government houses were given to ANC supporters or those who could afford a bribe were "a distortion of the truth".