



Visually impaired people who live and work at the Enduduzweni Skills Development Centre, in Umlazi, protest against their imminent removal from the centre, which centre has been closed because the building has been condemned. PICTURE: SIBUSISO NDLOVU

# Residents don't want to leave condemned centre

Nosipho Mngoma

THE KwaZulu-Natal Department of Social Development is adamant that residents of an Umlazi centre for the blind must vacate the condemned building.

However, members of the group are digging in their heels and are determined to fight what they believe is a ploy to “throw them away”.

The residents live at the centre where they also make cane furniture and only return to their homes in other parts of KZN and other provinces during the holidays.

A meeting between residents of Enduduzweni Skills Development Centre and Social Development MEC Weziwe Thusi ended in a dead-

lock yesterday as residents vowed not to move until they got reassurance in writing as to when they could move back.

In response, Thusi said the condemnation of a building was an emergency situation which they couldn't override.

She made mention of other buildings such as the Esplanade Government Building which was condemned in 2013, leading to the immediate evacuation of SASSA and other staff as well as clients.

Earlier, residents had closed the gates of the centre holding placards and chanting slogans insisting that they would not move.

Police were called in to intervene but eventually the group agreed to meet with MEC Thusi at a nearby place

of safety. The residents said they were unhappy with how the matter was handled.

“We were told during the holidays not to come back without anyone sitting down with us to explain what exactly is wrong with Enduduzweni,” said Themba Shiba.

## Talks

Shiba has been living and working – making cane furniture – at the centre for decades.

He chanted the phrase, “nothing for us without us”, as he rose to address the MEC.

Member of the provincial legislature Yatima Nahara suggested a two-week period of talks which residents accepted. However, Thusi maintained that they needed to leave today.

Thusi explained to residents that the condemnation of a building meant it was not safe for habitation and there was no way she could allow them to continue living there.

She said a suggestion that the group occupy a portion of the premises while the other is being renovated was not feasible.

“We can't tell you when the renovation will be complete because the Department of Public Works has asked for time to assess what needs to be renovated and what needs to be constructed anew.

“They cannot do that until the premises is vacated. We are asking that you go home for a while so that the place can be fixed, it is temporary, we are not closing the centre down,”

said Thusi.

Resident Zenzele Sosibo said their fear was that the department wanted to close the centre for good and would only move if they could get a reassurance in writing of at least an estimated date of completion of construction and an assurance that they would still receive their R230 a day stipend.

In response, Thusi said: “I am Christian and I am a member of the people's ANC. The ANC keeps its promises, as a Christian I do not lie.

“You will receive your stipend.”

The department had committed to providing transportation for the residents some of whom came from as far as Gauteng and Zululand.