



Cops open fire on protesters



ARRESTS: Fourteen people were arrested after protesters in Ritchie blockaded the roads for a second day.

Picture: Soraya Crowie

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TWO RITCHIE residents were hit by rubber bullets and 14 community members were arrested after police opened fire on protesters yesterday.

For the second day in a row residents of the small community took to the streets and barricaded roads with stones and burning tyres as they expressed their anger at the appointment of 20 Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers.

Community members have accused the Sol Plaatje Municipality of appointing work-

ers to the project in an underhanded manner and have pointed fingers at the executive mayor, Mangaliso Matika, for approving the appointments.

Matika is scheduled to visit the area tomorrow and announce the names of the 20 EPWP workers.

Members of the Public Order Police kept a watchful eye on the protesters, who were burning tyres, yesterday morning. Later in the day the situation intensified and the police fired rubber bullets to disperse the crowd.

According to community members, a 15-year-old girl was struck on the hand by a

rubber bullet and another resident was hit on the head.

Police spokesperson, Captain Olebogeng Tawana, confirmed that several other protesters were arrested.

"The Northern Cape Public Order Police arrested 14 people and charged them with public violence during a protest in the area of Ritchie. No injuries were reported," said Tawana.

The residents have vowed to continue with their protest action until those who were arrested are released and the mayor has addressed them in person.

"The police fired at us unnecessarily. We were protesting in a peaceful manner and there was no violence. Everyone at the protest was demonstrating in an orderly manner, yet the police opened fire on us. Several people, many of whom are parents, were arrested for no reason. We are fighting for our rights but the police are arresting and shooting at us," community members said yesterday afternoon.

"We need Matika to come and hear the complaints of the people himself. We need clarity on how these workers were appointed to the EPWP project, as there are many matriculants who qualify for the positions. We are tired of people appointing their friends whenever there are employment opportunities."

Sol Plaatje Municipality spokesperson, Sello Matsie, urged communities to follow the correct channels to voice their grievances.

"People will not be appointed according to their political affiliation or whether they are friends with whomever. Whoever the selected 20 EPWP workers are, the assurance is given that they should be from Ritchie. The project is to uplift the people in the area and for the unemployed to gain employment," said Matsie.

He also pointed out that it was of concern that school children were attending the protests.

"This issue does not concern the children. If community members are unhappy they should express their concerns with their ward councillor, who is supposed to raise it with the municipality," said Matsie.



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