

Families flee homes

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'This place is a war zone'

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THE land grab situation in Bonela, Durban, has reached "breaking point", with terrified families fleeing their homes after weeks of violence.

"I cannot stress enough how important it is for Metro Police, SAPS Cato Manor and the Public Order Policing Unit to enforce the law," said Ward 30 councillor Warren Burne. "If those who are performing criminal activities are arrested and charged, it might help the situation."

Burne met with hundreds of fearful residents at Bonela Secondary School at the weekend to address the situation and to explain the impact of a recent court order, which effectively allows 241 families from the Cato Manor Informal Settlement and six other settlements in KwaZulu-Natal to rebuild their shacks on specific sites they claimed to have lived on, until the structures were demolished by the eThekweni Municipality's Land Invasion Unit over the past three months.

The order has created further invasions by opportunistic land grabbers, who have been hacking down trees and clearing forestry to mark out plots for themselves.

Residents said they had endured weeks of "hell" since the Durban High Court granted the order on July 27.

Several roads in Bonela – Tait Place, Wiggins Road, Blinkbonnie Road, Carnforth Road and Carlow Road – have been blocked off to traffic by hundreds of shack dwellers, some armed with bush knives, machetes and guns as they insult and intimidate residents, they said.

A member of the Sesfikile Community Crime Prevention Association, who lives on Blinkbonnie Road, said: "People are living in fear. No one can enter, no one can leave. All the roads are blocked and they are stoning every passing vehicle. The situation is turning volatile and is turning into a racial issue."

Dimple Harrikissoon, 27, and her family are now living with a neighbour after her home on Tait

Terrified families flee homes



The aftermath of a petrol bombed home on Tait Place in Bonela.

Place was petrol bombed around midday on Saturday.

"I received the news that my home was petrol bombed while I was at work. I jumped into a taxi and rushed over. The bomb landed on our roof and exploded over the open plan kitchen and lounge area. At the time, my son was playing outside with my mum, but my dad and two other guys who live with us were inside. They had to break the window and the burglar guards just to get out," she said.

"Now there is only walls left of the house, nothing else. Ever since these land invaders have come into the area they have caused a lot of havoc. The crime rate has increased drastically. We are so tired of this, please leave us alone. They must do what they want to do, but just leave us out of it."

Another resident claims that no one is helping them.

"This place is a war zone. The dwellers gather in groups and intimidate the residents, blaming us for reporting the land invasions. On Thursday night, a house was burnt down. We called the fire department who refused to come without police backup. Other homes are being

robbed left, right and centre. Seven water meters have been bust. Families are abandoning their homes in fear. We called Cato Manor SAPS who can't do much. We called the Land Invasion Unit who come to the area but leave at 5pm, which is when chaos starts and the poles for the informal structures are erected. In a span of two days there's already a structure up."

The public relations officer of the Cato Manor CPF, Shola Mahomed, 57, who lives on Wiggins Road, said Bonela used to be a peaceful place but now people can't even drive through the area.

"They are burning the bushes and erecting shacks and people are getting frustrated. But I urge them not to retaliate. Their safety is more important and will not help the situation. We as a CPF are trying our level best to elevate the situation to the highest authorities, but people keep waiting for someone else to report the matter. If everyone from the community starts phoning the municipality and relevant departments, our plight will be highlighted and sooner or later something will be done."

Burne told POST that



Angry land grabbers gather in Bonela.

following Saturday's meeting, attended by about 300 people, residents will be making affidavits stating no one had been living on the disputed land prior to the court order.

This information will be conveyed to the court when the matter comes up again next Friday, he said.

Mzwakhe Mdalose, vice-president of the shack dwellers movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, said they do not condone violent behaviour and have called the illegal occupiers "opportunists" who have been motivated politically.

Municipality spokesperson Tozi Mthethwa said they were aware of the sharp increase in the number of illegal land invasions and were doing everything in their power to protect the rights of residents and businesses.

"We... cannot allow lawlessness to prevail. Inasmuch as we recognise and protect human rights we also have an obligation to protect community interests," she said.

The KZN Department of Human Settlements and Public Works said it owned a major part of the land.

"However, in terms of eThekweni Municipality's town planning, it is zoned public open space and has a D'Moss status, ie environmental protection," said spokesperson Mbulelo Baloyi.

"The department is presently preparing court papers to inter-

vene. We also believe the current court order against eThekweni Municipality's Land Invasion Unit is being misrepresented to incite others to invade."

Baloyi said the department had "engaged" with the municipality, the Department of Community, Safety and Liaison as well as the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs on Monday to find an amicable solution.

Meanwhile, Omi Nair, head of the Crossmoor Crisis Committee which has been fighting land grabbers in Chatsworth for months, urged Bonela residents to be vigilant and visible.

"It is so sad to see what is happening in Bonela but people need to be proactive," she said. "These are criminal elements and are coming to our communities and building wherever they see fit. Where are our rights as taxpayers and ratepayers? If we just put up a carport we are fined, but others can put up shacks and become violent and nothing is done."

Added Nair: "There simply cannot be two sets of rules for two sets of people. National government needs to start cracking the whip. Put up signage and fence off the area if they have to."

SAPS spokesperson Colonel Thembeke Mbhele said no arrests had been made.