

# Striking deeds office staff now want new building

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THERE'S no end in sight to the snarl-up at the Pietermaritzburg deeds office as staff who downed tools two weeks ago over poor working conditions now want to be moved to a new building.

Property transfers throughout the province ground to a halt recently when around 150 staff at the office stopped working over a lack of air conditioning in the building and other concerns.

The work stoppage is ongoing.

However, Zimasile Giyama, the National Education Health and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu) secretary for the Harry Gwala region, said yesterday that the issue was "no longer about the air-conditioning", but about the "imminent collapse of the building".

"There are big cracks in the walls and our members are being exposed to black mould that is growing inside the cracks," said Giyama. "The conditions are too much. We do not want a quick solution, we want a long-term solution. We need a new building."

Last week *The Witness* quoted The Institute of Estate Agents (IEASA) as

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saying that the issues at the deeds office in Pietermaritzburg had brought the entire KZN property transfer system to its knees as one can only process or register properties with the deeds office.

In response to the strike, Pietermaritzburg's legal fraternity has sought ways to try to resolve the impasse.

Local attorney John Christie, who is a member of the KwaZulu-Natal Law Society, said last night that a group of Pietermaritzburg conveyancers had met on Friday to discuss possible resolutions.

He stressed, however, that he was speaking in his personal capacity and not on behalf of the Society.

He said the meeting had been held by the Law Society Deeds Office Liaison Committee.

He said one of the proposals was

that conveyancing firms in the province would be approached to help pay for portable air conditioning for the registry, until the problem is resolved permanently by the relevant state department.

He added, however, that the proposal would have to be accepted by the deeds registry staff, and by the union representing them.

"Any arrangements made by the lo-

cal conveyancers will depend on the consent and co-operation of the offices of the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, and also by the Department of Public Works.

"The delays in the registration of deeds, which have occurred since February 16, have been extremely prejudicial to all role players involved in the property industry, not to mention the general public at large," he said.

Last week the deeds office staff told *The Witness* that their main complaint was that they had to work in "hot and stuffy" conditions for the last six years.

They said they had complained to management about three years ago, to no avail.

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