

'Invaders' rebuilding structures

Farm 924 demolitions do not stop people hungry for their own homes

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On Monday, just two days after Buffalo City Metro demolished newly built houses on Farm 924 near the East London Airport, locals started rebuilding.

Following the demolitions on Friday that left many in tears, the residents from Bhongweni and Ntentseni who were seen on the site denied they had been building on municipal land.

Some of their homes had also been attacked by another group of people in the area.

Owners of the demolished one-room structures told the Dispatch they had paid up to R6,000 to secure the now flattened structures.

However, other disgruntled residents accused the homeowners of being outsiders who had taken their land and staged a violent protest on Thursday, when they vandalised and destroyed some houses in an attempt to chase the owners away.

Over the weekend locals allocated one another plots. They were led by a group of residents appointed as a committee.

Resident Nomakhaya Mapekula, 47, said: "This started last year when we tried to invade this land. The municipality



WHAT TO DO: Nomakhaya Mapekula was among some Ntentseni residents rebuilding structures on Farm 924 on Monday after BCM demolished structures on Friday. Picture: SIBONGILE NGALWA

stopped us and our community leaders said they would engage with the municipality.

"Now we were shocked to learn that the same land we were waiting for was sold to other people just because they can afford to pay this R6,000.

"The residents decided to stage a protest and remove the people who built here because they are not even from this place. We are not working, I survive on my children's social grant so I could not afford the R6,000."

The mother of two said she was desperate for land as she did not have a place to call home.

"I am staying at a relative's place even now and living there is painful. I'm not free because it's not my home, every now and again I get eviction threats from other family members who are also claiming that home.

"We are not doing this because we have nothing better to do. We are desperate for land, we need homes for our chil-

dren," said the teary woman.

Resident Patrick Pele, 58, was seen cleaning "his plot".

He said: "We did not pay a cent for the plots because we were on the initial list.

"We are unemployed, where are we supposed to get R6,000?"

"I live in a small shack and have three children who I am trying to build a home for. This land will help me."

When the Dispatch visited the area on Monday, locals were seen clearing bush, rebuilding

with the bricks that were still useable after homes were flattened by BCM, and some were building shacks.

BCM spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said on Friday that Farm 924 was shared by BCM, the provincial department of public works and a private owner.

He alleged that people were invading the metro's land and said the metro would prevent the invasion.

Ngwenya said on Monday "We would like to issue a stern warning to anyone invading that property that they will face the full might of the law.

"Following the implementation of the court order during the operation last Friday, police will be carrying out regular site patrols and those found encroaching or carrying out illegal activities will be arrested and prosecuted for trespassing."

Asked why BCM had failed to demolish houses illegally built at Bhongweni Location over the last few years, Ngwenya said the land was owned by the department of public works.

"As a city, we still have a responsibility of notifying the landowner when an illegal invasion occurs on their property as they have the duty to protect their land through the law. We have alerted them in writing following the discovery that some of the invasions that were around Erf 924 are now happening on Erf 871."