

Chief won't go after one year

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A small group of Khoisan protesters has been camping outside the Union Buildings for a year now, calling on the government to heed their demands.

"We are fighting for our very existence here," said the group's leader, Chief Khoisan SA. "We will only leave if President Cyril Ramaphosa himself talks to us. The only other way I would leave is if I die here."

The year camped out at the Union Buildings, with the authorities reportedly paying them little attention, has only made them "more determined" than before, he said.

Chief Khoisan SA wants the government to recognise the Khoisan people as the country's "first indigenous nation".

The group is demanding that the Khoisan no longer be classified as "coloured", which they say presents a danger to the future of their culture.

They also want the government "to acknowledge and teach our dances, rituals and telling our story to other indigenous people".

"This Saturday it will be a year since we came here. Until now, we have not received any feedback from anyone in government regarding the issues put to them," he told *Rekord*.

Chief Khoisan may be more determined than before, but he admits that some people in the group lost hope and gave up on the protest to go back home.

"In the beginning we had a lot of energy; however, due to politics and rumours on social media, a lot of our members abandoned ship."

He, however, said a conference planned for 2020 might catch the government's attention.

"We must decide what pressure we will apply and how we are going to resolve issues regarding our demands," said the chief.

"We must start being harsh with government and push them for results."

Chief Khoisan said they had witnessed "a speck" of progress recently when a Khoisan praise singer was chosen to welcome the president during the opening of parliament in the Khoi Khoi Khoekhoegowab language.

"It showed our language to South Africans and across the world. This also showed that the Khoisan people were not just something from textbooks, but are very much alive."

The group of Khoisan men and women have had an "unpleasant" year at the Union Buildings.

They said they had to endure sleeping in ripped rickety tents facing extreme weather they were unaccustomed to.

"The weather we encountered was very bad, especially the thunder and lightning."

He claimed that during their stay at the buildings, public works

department employees tried to subtly put pressure on them to leave.

"Taps we would normally use to get water would be cut off – that sort of thing," he claimed.

The group also faced problems with funding for food and other everyday basic needs. However, good Samaritans would visit them from time to time and offer help.

Their demands include that the label "coloured" be removed from all official papers and be replaced with "Khoisan".

Kwadi-Khoe must also be listed as an official language in South Africa.

They also wanted the Khoisan to be given land and resources to continue their culture and traditions.

The protest came after they rejected the traditional Khoisan and leadership amendment bill, which was passed in the

National Council of Provinces in January.

"The bill does not put the emphasis on land. As the first nation the land belongs to us," said Chief Khoisan SA.

Cooperative Governance and

Traditional Affairs spokesperson Lungi Mtshali was contacted for comment and promised to reply, however, failed to reply by the time of going to print.

Previously Mtshali said the government remained committed to addressing issues of concern to the Khoi and San communities.

"Regarding the demand to remove the word "coloured", the group was informed that such removal could not be effected without following a public consultation process," said Mtshali.

He, however, added that it was proposed to Chief Khoisan SA and members that the cabinet could be approached to consider amending relevant government forms to include the name Khoisan as part of the classification of communities in South Africa but without removing the word "coloured" at this stage.

"Cabinet could be requested also to approve a public participation process on the word coloured. This process could provide direction on the future of this terminology."

He said government had also promoted and recognised the Khoi and San languages, through the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) by distributing 500 copies of the Khoekhoegowab Dictionary Glossarium.

- A Memorandum of Agreement was signed with Namibia on a working relationship to develop, protect and train educators who will be able to educate children on the language and culture of the Khoisan communities;

- A workshop has been planned by PANSALB with the Khoisan communities to further enhance the research work and become more involved in providing information and taking part in the research on languages and culture.

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Chief Khoisan SA at the campsite.

