

‘ILLEGAL OCCUPANTS’

SAPS enforce evictions in state buildings

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THE KwaZulu-Natal provincial police have begun evicting “illegal occupants” from state-owned residential buildings which were used as accommodation for police officers.

Police management said the buildings on Stalwart Simelane Street and North Ridge Road, Durban, needed to be renovated.

However, the renovation plans, which date back several years, have stalled as residents in the buildings have refused to leave.

When the SAPS issued a final eviction notice in 2018, many police officers left the buildings, while others remained. In addition, civilian families also moved into the buildings.

A police officer, who spoke to The Mercury on condition of anonymity, said the civilians were paying rent to police officers who had left the

buildings.

He alleged that the SAPS vandalised the windows and doors and cut off the water and electricity supply.

“They did this to force us out of the buildings. They wanted to make sure that we are suffering so that we move out. This led to civilians occupying the buildings and they installed their doors and windows, while some officers gradually left the buildings and rented out the rooms,” he said.

He estimated that about 70% of the occupants were civilians while about 30% were SAPS employees.

The officer explained that police members who were still living in the building were not against leaving, however, they wanted the employer to provide them with alternative accommodation.

“We are willing to pay rent if needs be. They must provide us with an alternative building because we have children that go to schools nearby,”

he said.

He said while there had been a lull in eviction proceedings in the past year, on Friday there had been renewed attempts to evict the occupants.

In Friday’s operation, a number of people were issued with fines and warning statements, saying that they were trespassing on the property and that they should vacate.

Another operation was also held yesterday where people were issued with fines.

Provincial police spokesperson Brigadier Jay Naicker said about 32 illegal occupants were issued with fines and a warning on April 30.

He said that of the 32, three were police officers, five were civilian employees of the SAPS and 24 were private citizens.

He could not confirm the number of fines issued in yesterday’s operation.

Naicker said there had been a long-standing attempt by the SAPS to

evict people who had illegally occupied state-owned buildings in Durban.

“Some illegal occupants are SAPS members while others are private citizens.”

He said the buildings were condemned and needed to be renovated, but the illegal occupants have refused to move out.

He said the SAPS had approached the courts to have the illegal occupants removed so that the SAPS can renovate the buildings.

KwaZulu-Natal’s South African Police Union (Sapu) provincial secretary, Nurse Mdletshe, accused the provincial police management of not playing by the rules.

Mdletshe said that in March this year, they agreed with the management that they would advise their members to evacuate the buildings as it was in a poor state.

She said that the union also withdrew the matter from the court, where

they sought to interdict the eviction process, on the basis that there would be further engagements about free transfers for police officers to work in their home towns.

Mdletshe accused the management of going behind their backs.

“As the union, we do believe that to have our members in that building doesn’t help. They are now living like hooligans as if they are not serving the state. The police should be arresting the civilians, not our members. We had agreed with them that we were going to have engagements on the matter, however, they are doing this now,” she said. She said that they would meet their members soon in order to chart a way forward.

Department of Public Works and Infrastructure spokesperson Thamsanqa Mchunu confirmed the department was supposed to renovate the buildings for SAPS but the residents had refused to vacate.