

Families still homeless six months later

BHONGO JACOB

The 77 families from the Airport Park community near King Phalo Airport, remain homeless six months after the department of public works & infrastructure was ordered to immediately restore the housing structures it had demolished in July last year.

The department was ordered by the East London high court in December 2020 to rebuild the structures to their original form.

This was after high court judge Belinda Hartle found that the national public works department had broken the law when 77 houses built on the state-owned Greydell Farm in Bhongweni near the airport, were demolished.

The families were evicted and the houses destroyed despite a prohibition on evictions under level 3 of the lockdown in terms of the national state of disaster last year.

Some of the demolished houses built at Greydell were reportedly worth more than R200,000.

In August, affected residents resolved to contribute R500 each towards the legal costs of fighting the evictions and demolitions.

In December, Hartle ruled in favour of the homeowners, saying the residents whose houses were destroyed were entitled to have their homes restored as

soon as possible.

Hartle also instructed the department that the new structures had to be at least equivalent to those that had been demolished, and be capable of being dismantled upon their eviction from the property ultimately, if so ordered by the court.

When the Dispatch arrived in the community on Tuesday morning, residents were seen rebuilding their homes, while some had erected temporary structures on the land.

National public works spokesperson Thami Mchunu on Tuesday said the department was challenging the judgment. "The matter was taken on appeal and judgment by the appeal court is still pending."

Airport Park and Bhongweni committee chair Simphiwe Fani told the Dispatch on Tuesday that the 77 families were still without homes and remained in the dark about the future.

"What the government is doing to us is cruel. One of the elderly women whose house was demolished died of stress before her house was rebuilt.

"She had used her last money, but her house was demolished right in front of her."

Fani vowed to continue fighting the department until the houses were rebuilt.

"Some people moved to other towns. Some are now living in shacks. The government failed



BROKEN PROMISES: The 77 families from the Airport Park community, near King Phalo Airport in East London remain homeless, six months after the department of public works and infrastructure was ordered to immediately restore housing structures it demolished in July last year. One of those affected, Mcedisi Sodawe, stands in front of one of the destroyed houses. Picture: BHONGO JACOB

to build people RDP houses, yet they are quick to come here and destroy black people's houses.

One of those affected, Mcedisi Sodawe said: "We will never forget that day.

"While the nation was on lockdown, we had no place to live. The children, and the elderly were crying, but the government officials continued de-

stroying what we thought would be our family homes.

"We were humiliated, and pointed at with guns, and could not defend ourselves."

He said the family was still feeling the effects of losing their house worth more than R200,000.

"They destroyed our family shack first, my wife, and myself

were sick with Covid-19. We had taken a loan to build a better house for our family. We spent R210,000 and it all went down the drain."

Former provincial EFF caucus leader Themba Wele, who sits on the Airport Park committee, echoed their sentiments.

"It's been seven months and people are still without their

homes. We took money from our own pockets and won the case against the government, but now the same government is challenging us.

"They are taking us back to the olden days when black people were not allowed to live close to the city. We are going nowhere because the court has decided on this matter."