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HOUSING

Flood victims `betrayed`

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WITH Christmas around the corner, hopes of spending the holidays in new homes are slowly diminishing for families who have been living at the Truro Hall in Northdale, Pietermaritzburg, since April.

Twenty-four families have been sharing the community hall since their homes were washed away by the floods.

The first group of six families arrived at the hall on April 15 from the nearby Nkululeko informal settlement.

Andiswa Magashane, who lost her belongings and was squatting with neighbours before moving to the community hall, said life at Truro for the past seven months had been stressful.

She told the *Sunday Tribune* she had been living at the informal settlement for 13 years with her three children and her sister but the floods washed away her home.

"When we arrived at the hall we thought this would be a temporary arrangement. In the early days, social workers visited regularly and donations of food and other essentials were frequent, but all the assistance has since dried up," she said.

Magashane said Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma visited them in April and on seeing their living conditions, apparently asked that Msunduzi mayor Mzi Thebolla move them to an open field and provide electricity.

"Instead the mayor said they would be building transitional residential units (TRU)," she said. "But the last time anyone came to speak to

us about houses and relocation was in September."

Sithembiso Mwet, with his wife and four children between the ages of 7 months and 11 years, arrived at the hall with the second group of families in May.

Mwet said when Premier Nomusa Dube Ncube visited, along with former Cogta MEC Siphon Hlomuka, they had promised them jobs within the Expanded Public Works Programme but they remain unemployed.

Deputy mayor Mkhize said he had met with ward committee members at least three times since taking over. He said a piece of land had been identified where temporary structures would be built and a contractor had been appointed.

He explained that their priority was the first group of families who had been moved by the Department of Human Settlement to Truro Hall. Officials had managed to verify that their homes were damaged during the floods. The second group came to live at the hall voluntarily.

Mkhize said officials had discovered that some of the families in the second group still had homes in good living conditions. They apparently came to the hall as they believed it was only victims of the floods who would benefit from houses that will be built as part of Msunduzi's plan to eradicate informal settlements.

"We are holding a public meeting today to inform the community about the piece of land we have agreed on. We didn't want to start building without informing them as that would be undermining them. If we have their buy-in, we can start building as soon as Monday."