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Residents vow to stay on tracks

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People residing along the railway line in Langa and Philippi stated that as long as the government doesn't provide them with alternative land to stay the trains won't operate.

They accused the government officials of working at a snail's pace to relocate them. This emerged during the stakeholder's meeting held at Ruth First Community Hall on Monday 11 September.

The meeting was organised by the Department of Transport in partnership with Human Settlements and Public Works and Infrastructure.

Before the meeting, ministers Sindiwe Chikunga and Sihle Zikalala visited the Siyahhlala informal settlement in Langa and the Eyadini informal settlement in Philippi.

Mxoleleni Ngutyana, a community leader at Siyahhlala, stated that they did not trust the government officials because they made empty promises.

"We can't sleep in our shacks. The community is harassing us. They are accusing us of misleading them. In their eyes, we are the ones who are lying to them," said Ngutyana.

Commenting on their living conditions, Ngutyana said there was nothing for the community. This has forced residents to resort to illegal means, including illegal electricity

connections.

Commenting on the plans to resolve the impasse, Chikunga said through Operation Bhekela several interventions were in place to ensure an amicable solution.

The operation is an initiative established by the Passenger Railway Agency South Africa (Prasa) to relocate people residing along the railway lines.

"There is Phase One, which we were running by providing services between the lines corridors. Phase Two is to identify land within Prasa land which will remove the residents away from railway lines so that we are able to do the work. I've appointed the service providers who must do the work on the central

line. So if we relocate people on a temporary or permanent basis will therefore do the rehabilitation and provide services," said Chikunga. She hinted at the devolution of railway transport in the province but added that would be a protracted process.

"We need to come up with a strategy to go to the cabinet for approval. There is still a long way to go on that one," she explained.

She stated that she was happy to meet all the stakeholders involved in the matter, adding that they all understood the government's position on the matter. "They are hungry for information," said Chikunga.

She said the central line would probably be operational by March next year.



Minister of Transport Sindiwe Chikunga and her Public Works and Infrastructure counterpart Sihle Zikalala lead the delegates during a walk about at the Philippi railway line.
PHOTOS: UNATHI OBOSE



Railway tracks in the central line have been severely vandalised and in some instances people have moved on to the tracks.