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The group have become a tourist attraction favourite. The king said locals and internationals flock to come to see them. **Photos: Manna Maurice**



King Khoisan.

Khoisan refuse to abandon 'protest'

» Manna Maurice

Now in the fifth year of their protest, the Khoisan people remain steadfast in their quest for first nation recognition and land rights.

The group has been camped in the garden at the Union Buildings since December 5, 2018.

Speaking to *Record*, the group leader and king said he never envisioned the protest lasting this long.

"At first we thought that our journey would be one or two months long, we never expected that we'd be going into the fifth year now," the king said.

The protesters left Eastern Cape on November 17, 2018 and arrived at the Union Buildings on December 5, 2018.

They want the government to recognise them as "the first nation of South Africa", and make their language Khoek-khoeb official.

"We are hopeful with the elections coming up, the world will see that the South African government is reluctant to talk to people that are right in front of them. This will break them politically," the king continued.

The Khoisan people have been the subject of much controversy over the years:

- in 2019 they rejected the Traditional and Khoisan Leadership Act
 - in 2022, the king and three of his subjects were arrested for alleged growing and dealing dagga
 - in October 2022, the group walked 50km to raise awareness of a lack of housing.
- The king said though the group received the fourth notice to vacate the area in 30 days on March 13, its resolve to stay remains.
- "We will stay here, they need to understand that the laws that they put on us are not laws we recognise as first nation people. We follow the law of the land, they follow the law of the sea."

The king blames political technicalities for

his tribe's long stay at the Union Buildings, stating they make it harder to have its demands, especially the land and recognition, met.

"Everyone wants land: from the EFF to the Black First Land First and other political parties, so it makes things complicated for them [ANC] from a political standpoint as there are a lot of technicalities to consider when it comes to the land which is a major concern."

The Khoisan people still believe that the government has failed in handling the situation.

"The government has failed us the first

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has not failed to remedy the situation. We are following legal court processes.

Spokesperson Thami Mchunu

nation people, and the people of South Africa. A lot of people contact me and are shocked that we are still here after all these years.

"The biggest issue is recognition. Not just from the government but all the tribes in the nation. If they all say 'we recognise the Khoisan as the first nation' then it's all a matter of documentation.

"Some of our members are saying that things would've been better under apartheid and it's sad because these are our own African brothers and sisters," he said.

The king said sustenance and shelter against the elements were a problem at the campsite and the protesters are living off the generosity of good Samaritans. He asked for donations to build a sturdier shelter.

The group has become a tourist attraction. The king said locals and internationals flock

to come to see them. The Khoisan people believe that they will carry their message to foreign lands and their movement will gain from it.

"A lot of people think that the Khoisan came to the Union Buildings and left but we are still here."

The king lamented the closure of the garden for weekends claiming it was another tactic by the government to silence them.

"They are trying to have less people come see us. The weekends are when most people aren't working and schools are closed. To take that away presents another struggle."

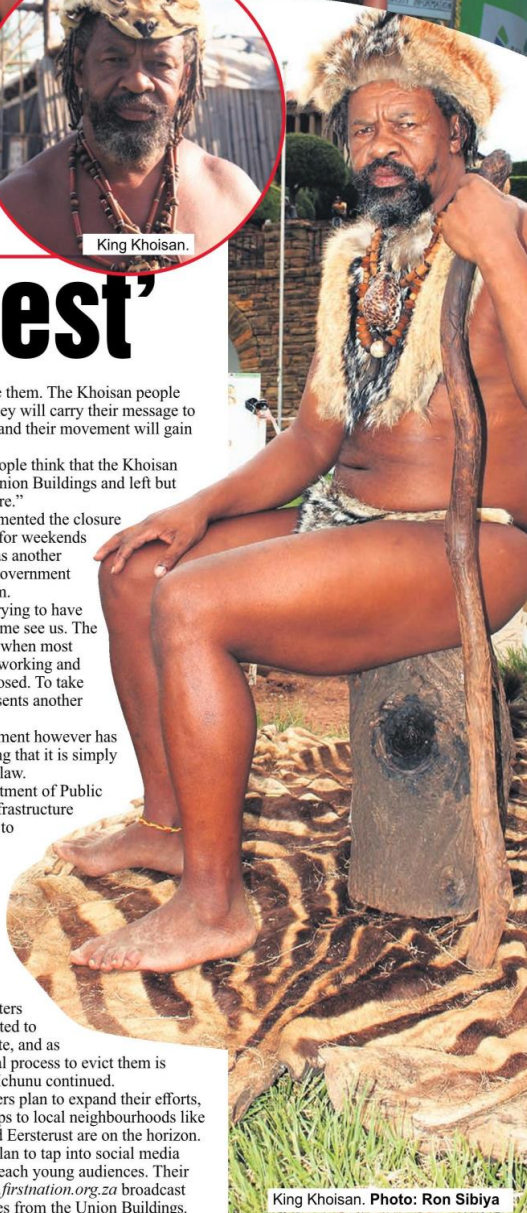
The government however has hit back, saying that it is simply following the law.

"The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has not failed to remedy the situation. We are following legal court processes," said spokesperson Thami Mchunu.

"The protesters are not permitted to camp at the site, and as a result, a legal process to evict them is underway," Mchunu continued.

The protesters plan to expand their efforts, saying that trips to local neighbourhoods like Mamelodi and Eersterust are on the horizon.

They also plan to tap into social media platforms to reach young audiences. Their website, www.firsnation.org.za broadcast their daily tales from the Union Buildings.



King Khoisan. Photo: Ron Sibiya