



Publication: Cape Argus Early - Main
Title: Dispute over Central Line
Publish date: 31 Aug 2023
Page: 1

Reach: 10459
AVE: R 42248.67
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Dispute over Central Line

Prasa to start removing shack dwellers

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AS HUMAN Settlements Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi declared a dispute in terms of the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act (IGR) with the City over the Central Line relocations, Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (Prasa) CEO Hishaam Emeran said he would start efforts to recover land invaded by the Siyahlala shack dwellers in 2019 within seven days.

Kubayi told Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) that she had asked the Cogta minister to provide an independent mediator as part of the dispute resolution provided for in the IGR.

She was briefing Scopa on the progress regarding the relocation of illegal dwellers on the railway reserve between Philippi and Langa.

Scopa also met Prasa, City, the Housing Development Agency (HDA) and the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure who are all involved in the matter which goes back to October 2019 when 1254 informal dwellers erected structures illegally on Prasa's Central Line in Langa and about 3688 Informal dwellers did the same at Philippi Station and 253 Illegal dwellers pitched their shacks at Khayelitsha Station.

In November, the Western Cape High Court awarded Prasa an eviction order to remove the illegal occupants on or before November 26.

During the briefing, Kubayi denounced the City over what she termed "a lack of co-operation" about the relocation of the shack dwellers on the Central Line.

The City, the HDA and Prasa form part of the implementation protocol whose job it is to ensure that the shack dwellers are resettled in a new area.

However, mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis said the City's mandate did not cover land purchase.

"We have clear and separate delineated responsibilities in law and in the implementation protocol. We are

sticking to our end of the bargain in the implementation protocol. That's what we signed. And that's what everyone has signed up to."

In its update to Scopa, the HDA reported that it had concluded the acquisition of land for Phase 1 of the relocation, with acquisition processes for Phase 2 under way.

Emeran announced the plan for the Central Line shack dwellers at a media briefing yesterday, while unveiling parts of the rail service group's recovered Northern corridor on the Eerste River line.

He said that to kickstart its recovery process, the group would be implementing an interim plan, Operation Bekela (move over), to remove about 900 shack dwellers, whose structures were directly on top of rail infrastructure, within a week, after which its contractors would begin preparing the area before reconstruction efforts could start.

Emeran also stated that the group had disclosed its plan to all involved parties and Scopa on Tuesday, saying that it was placing the timeline to complete the plan at between three and four weeks, and the complete recovery of the Central line corridor by the end of the current financial year.

"The relocation process of the group of people living on rail infrastructure between our Langa and Philippi stations does not solely fall on Prasa. However, because our main focus is the recovery of all our corridors, including the Central line corridor, we came up with Operation Bekela."

"On Tuesday, when we stood in front of Scopa to brief them on our plans, we gave them operation Bekela and also solidified commitments from involved government departments to relocate the group and assist them with where they could relocate to long term. I believe both the City and the Housing Development Agency (HDA) are on board," he said.

Currently, train services on the Central Line corridor operate to parts of Philippi, but parts of Nyanga, Chris Hani and Kapteinsklip are still out of service.