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# “We will close the taps”

BY ELMON TSHIKHUDO

**D**isgruntled borehole operators, who believe they have been unfairly cast aside by the Vhembe District Municipality (VDM), have threatened to “shut down the water plants” unless their demands are met.

In one of the biggest protest marches in Vhembe this year, hundreds of angry borehole operators, supported by concerned community members, marched to the VDM's offices in Thohoyandou last Friday.

Singing struggle songs and waving placards, the protesters marched along

Tenda Ratshitanga Road to the municipal offices, where they handed over their memorandum of demands.

Much to the disappointment of the marchers, the executive mayor, who was supposed to accept the memorandum, was not present. It was instead received by the municipal manager, Mr Norman Kutama, on her behalf. He promised that the memorandum would be addressed by the relevant authorities and that the municipality would respond in due course.

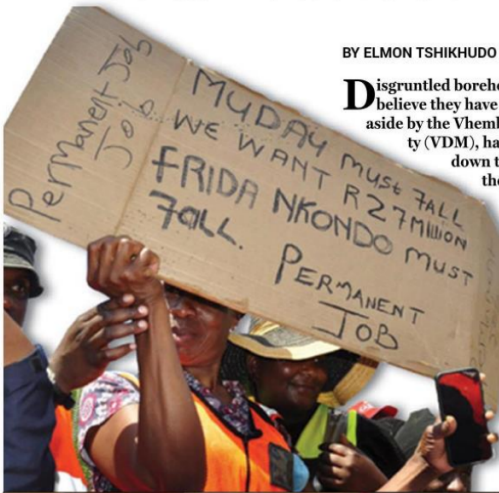
The representative of the borehole operators, Mr Lovemore Mayimele, outlined their demands, which include the permanent appointment of more than 500 borehole operators who have been operating the boreholes in villages around Vhembe on a voluntary basis for years. Some have provided their services for up to 13 years. Before the memorandum was handed over, elderly operators shared harrowing experiences involving encounters with snakes and other hardships faced during their duties.

Mayimele said that over the years, they had

done their best to ensure communities have access to water. “They now want us out of our posts and to employ their relatives. This will not happen under our watch. We are vowing today that no one will take our posts. We will fight to the bitter end. If they fail to listen to our plight, we are heading straight to Luthuli House, and we know they will listen to us,” he said.

Mayimele further indicated that the municipality had reneged on paying them their EPWP stipends. “This is the third month we have not received our payments. The officials live in luxury while we starve. Our children are also dropping out of school because we do not have money to take care of them. Starting from today, we are shutting down all the water plants, and we are giving the municipality seven days to provide a favourable response, failing which they should brace themselves for the worst,” said Mayimele.

Meanwhile, the dire water shortage, accompanied by an extreme heatwave, is severely affecting the Vhembe community.



Hundreds of protesters, being led by the police, marched to the municipal offices in Thohoyandou where they handed over their memorandum. Photo: Elmon Tshikhudo.