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Author: ZELDA VENTER and
MASABATA MKWANANZI

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A MEMBER of the Khoisan community who only identifies himself as Whillem (left) and Ruben Rustoff stand next to their belongings after they were finally removed from the Union Buildings yesterday. | ZELDA VENTER

'FIRST NATION' PROTESTERS

Khoisan group evicted from Union Buildings threatens to report Ramaphosa to Trump

ZELDA VENTER and MASABATA MKWANANZI

MEMBERS of the tiny group of Khoisan community members who have been camping in protest for years at the Union Buildings gardens have threatened to report their plight to US President Donald Trump.

This was said by some of the protesters as the police were evicting them from the site they had camped on since 2018 near the towering statue of South Africa's founding president, Nelson Mandela.

They criticised President Cyril Ramaphosa, calling him a coward for allowing their court-ordered eviction to happen and vowed to tell Trump about the treatment they were receiving from the government.

The Khoisan group has been protesting for their "indigenous rights" and recognition as South Africa's "first nation".

On December 11, 2024, the court granted the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure an eviction order, giving the Khoisan community 30 days to vacate the premises.

They have been demanding a meeting with Ramaphosa to address their grievances, which include recognition as the "first nation", land ownership, and the abolition of the term "coloured" sometimes used to describe them.

Willem Xesema, spokesperson for the Khoisan, said the group was taken aback by the eviction yesterday when a High Court sheriff presented paperwork informing them of their removal.

"We were shocked because the president knows the reason why we

are here because, for the past two weeks, they have been locking gates even for the public; now we know why. It was because they wanted to execute the eviction order that they had."

The eviction was initially scheduled for January 11 but was delayed after Queen and King Khoisan were involved in a car accident. The Department of Public Works previously said it wanted to show compassion and ubuntu in dealing with the group's eviction.

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure confirmed that the eviction order granted by the Gauteng High Court, Pretoria, on December 11, was enforced by law enforcement officials yesterday morning.

Spokesperson for the department, Lennox Mabaso, said it should be noted that no appeal or opposition has been received against this court order by any interested parties.

"While the department expresses its sympathy with the serious grievances of the Khoi-San community, no single person has the right to claim or occupy public space intended to be used and enjoyed by all South Africans."

Mabaso said the department worked and consulted with all stakeholders, including other government departments and the City of Tshwane, before the order was enforced to assist all individuals who were willing to return home.

But some are set on returning, as Ruben Rustoff and a member of the community who identified himself as Whillem said in an uncertain terms.

Asked where they will now go, the

pair said they have no idea, "but one thing is sure, we will soon be back".

Visibly upset with the group of police officers who kept a watchful eye as their belongings were being packed on the back of a waiting vehicle, the pair said they had no idea they were being evicted yesterday.

Rustoff explained that the first police officers arrived at the Union Buildings around 5am and surprised them. "They never told us today is the day that we will be evicted. They just came in and started to dismantle our structures."

According to Rustoff, the SAPS were very rude and they simply rounded up their belongings. He said they have no idea where their goat was, which they kept on the site, and whether the animal was still alive. Several of their live chickens were also missing.

Whillem said they were taken by surprise, and they did not even have time to eat in the morning.

While they called Ramaphosa a coward, they vowed to tell Trump about the treatment they were receiving from the government.

They said their leader, King Khoisan, who has been discharged from hospital after the car in which his wife died, was not present when the eviction took place.

"They knew he was not here and that is why they did it today," Rustoff said.

But the community was due to be evicted on January 11 already in terms of the eviction order. They were given a lifeline up to now due to the king's accident, in which his wife - Queen Khoisan SA - died.