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Former EPWP workers stand firm

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FORMER Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers, who are living at Gandhi Park opposite Durban City Hall, have vowed not to move until they are reinstated back to their duty by the eThekweni Municipality.

The 150 former EPWP workers were among the hundreds who received their marching orders from the municipality in July. Sthembile Shabalala, one of those affected, said they have been living at the park since August, in protest of their dismissal and to get the attention of the mayor, Cyril Xaba. "Prior to this I was renting in KwaMashu and lived with my kids," said Shabalala. "I have been working under the EPWP programme since 2014. How can they just fire us just like that? We saw our termination trending on social media before we even got our letters."

Shabalala, like her former colleagues, was working on six and 12-month contracts that were continually renewed by the city. "All we want is our jobs back, we will stay at this park until they attend to us because we lost our homes and our kids are suffering," said the mother of two.

Her resolve was shared by Philani Xulu, who insisted that



Over 150 former eThekweni EPWP workers have vowed to continue their protest by living at Gandhi Park opposite Durban City Hall. Photo: Sibongiseni Maphumulo

the fight will continue. "The mayor promised us that we will be reinstated after a month, that was supposed to be in August, and that has yet to happen," said Xulu. "Some of us spent Christmas at

this park because of our situation. We have lost a lot, most of us and our kids were depending on this salary and the municipality just does not care."

Municipal spokesperson, Gugu

Sisilana, said, "In October last year, Mayor Cyril Xaba reaffirmed that the municipality is exploring plans to revive the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and further announced

that the Council has given the city a green light to resuscitate the programme." She said the programme was affected by the R42 million budget cut from the Department of Public Works and that it had deviated from its policy objectives and conditions.

"The city is embarking on a new recruitment drive and will be using this opportunity to regularise the programme. After the Department of Public Works reduced the budget to R18 million, the city reprioritised funding to top up this amount. As a result, for the 2024/25 financial year, the budget permits us to recruit 1276 participants. Previously, the programme had over 4000 participants. These opportunities will be available to applicants between the ages of 18 and 35 years," said Sisilana.

She added, "The municipality has not deviated from the commitments communicated by the mayor."

The over 550 dismissed workers' fight has been taken to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration (CCMA) and the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC) under the Labour Relations Act (LRA). The workers are being represented by Stanley Moonsamy and guided by the legal expertise of human rights lawyer, Previn Vedan.