

Lockdown: Shack continue in Durban despite moratorium plea

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WATCH | Life in lockdown: Poverty keeps residents in informal settlements from staying home

It's day five of the lockdown in Mamelodi near Pretoria. The status quo remains unchanged. Children can be seen playing between shacks, groups of adults socialise with friends, while non-essential shops remain open for business.

Several people were seriously injured when the eThekweni municipality's demolition of shacks in Cato Manor and Mariannhill turned violent on Tuesday.

Housing activist movement Abahlali baseMjondolo accused the City of using the lockdown in the country to "wage a war" against the movement, [GroundUp reported](#).

The demolitions, which started last week, are ongoing at Azania informal settlement in Cato Manor and Ekuphumeleleni in Mariannhill.

The demolitions are being carried by the eThekweni municipality and its contractor, Calvin and Family Group.

On Tuesday, five people were seriously injured when they were shot, allegedly with pellet guns and live ammunition, by the security company.

One of the injured residents is still being treated in hospital.

On Tuesday, 15 shacks were destroyed in Azania and another three on Thursday as the private security company, police and the army were out in their numbers to chase residents from the site.

When GroundUp visited the settlement earlier in the week to report on a demolition in progress, an army member said we were not allowed to do so.

On this day, the demolition of shacks did not take long.

As soon as the convoy of security personnel, police and army left the settlement, shack dwellers started rebuilding a larger shack to accommodate many families.

WATCH | Police open fire on residents in Yeoville, News24 caught in the line of fire

On the first day of South Africa's nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the deadly Covid-19, police were out in numbers and resorted to the use of force to disperse residents. Using rubber bullets, the South African Police Service (SAPS) dis...

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"It is mainly used by women and children while the men sleep out in the open around the fire to keep them warm," a resident said.

Resident Mafu Zwane said their shacks had been demolished more than 55 times since they first moved onto the land in February 2019.

"They demolish shacks on a daily basis but we rebuild again. The recent demolitions have made it difficult for us to rebuild as they are burning and destroying everything we have. We have nothing to rebuild with," he said.

'This is assault, attempted murder...'

Namile Nkwelo was allegedly shot with live ammunition on Tuesday. He said they shot him while he was unarmed.

"It was only when I was running that I realised that I was shot," Nkwelo said, pointing to his right shoulder.

The bullet is still lodged in his body, he said.

Ayanda Mbuthuma who was also allegedly shot with live ammunition said he was with friends when he heard gunshots.

"People started dispersing and moving to different directions. I was shot twice. I don't remember much after that because I fainted. When I came to, I was on my way to the hospital," Mbuthuma said.

Residents say they are also angry because Cato Manor police have refused to open cases against the security company. They were told that they would be called in once the security company submitted its report, they said.

"This is assault, attempted murder and so many other transgressions that the security company committed and we are the ones at fault?" asked Zwane.

When asked to comment on the residents' claims, KZN police spokesperson Nqobile Gwala said: "We are advising the complainants to see the Cato Manor station commander for assistance."

In the meantime, residents say with the lockdown under way, they have no choice but to rebuild their homes.

On Thursday, Human Settlements Minister Lindiwe Sisulu pleaded with municipalities and private property owners to suspend evictions during the lockdown.

She asked that the municipalities rather prioritise curbing the spread of Covid-19.

Abahlali baseMjondolo deputy president Mqapheli Bonono said: "We are extremely concerned that the eThekweni municipality is refusing to obey the law of the country, the lockdown regulations and the direct instruction by the minister. We are also extremely concerned that this time the army was brought to join the attack and that the media was not allowed to witness."

Bonono said that if the government could not bring the municipality to order, they would have no choice but to defend themselves from the ongoing attacks.

eThekweni municipality spokesperson Msawakhe Mayisela said: "It should be noted that the City will not win the war against land invasion alone. It needs residents to be fully on board. We are taking land invasion seriously and the City has a fully-fledged unit whose sole responsibility is to deal with land invasions during this [lockdown] time."

Mayisela said that despite Sisulu's plea, the City's land invasion unit would be fully operational during the lockdown.

"We stress that the City's land invasion unit does not conduct evictions but demolishes unoccupied structures. The media [should] refrain from sensationalising. Abahlali BaseMjondolo should refrain from spreading lies to gain sympathy from the media. The demolitions were within the ambit of the law. The lockdown does not mean that lawlessness should prevail," Mayisela said.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/lockdown-shack-demolitions-continue-in-durban-despite-moratorium-plea-20200403>