

MK vets steal homes

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FRONT PAGE
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Excombatants take over Aloe Ridge, claim govt 'failed to deliver'

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POLITICAL EDITOR

RESIDENTS of Pietermaritzburg's flagship housing project, Aloe Ridge in Westgate-Grange are living in fear after "heavily armed" uMkhonto weSizwe excombatants invaded the complex yesterday. Close to 200 former uMkhonto weSizwe excombatants, alongside military veterans from the Pan Africanist Congress's Azanian People's Liberation Army (Apla) and Azapo's Azanian National Liberation Army (Azanla) took over more than 200 units at the complex after overpowering staff and seizing keys yesterday morning. When The Witness arrived at the site yesterday afternoon, leaders of the invaders were busy allocating apartments on the western side of the complex to the excombatants. Babo Mndaweni, one of the group's ring leaders, said they resolved to move in after the provincial government failed to deliver on its promises to provide the excombatants with free housing.



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Babo Mndaweni, one of the group's ring leaders, said they resolved to move in after the provincial government failed to deliver on its promises to provide the excombatants with free housing.

"What you see happening here is part of the government's radical economic transformation. As excombatants around the Msunduzi area we have resolved to embark on a programme to empower our members who are currently wallowing in poverty. This is the first phase of the programme.

"What is happening here is a peaceful process done by the disciplined cadres of joint military veterans," he said.

The largest of its kind across the entire KwaZuluNatal province, the Aloe Ridge project is designed to help low income groups to access rental accommodation within the city.

The more than 200 units the group have invaded form part of the complex's 950 units build by nonprofit organisation (NPO) Capital City Housing in conjunction with the Human Settlements Department.

More than 650 of the 950 apartments have already been leased to low income tenants. The 200 units that were invaded are part of the 300 units that have just been completed.

Members of the South African Police (SAPS) who were seen patrolling around the complex did not attempt to stop the invaders. By yesterday afternoon the number of invaders who were in the complex

stood at about 100. However, the number had doubled by evening as more people joined in the scramble for the apartments.

A Capital City Housing manager, who did not want to be identified for safety reasons, said the ex-combatants had been trying to invade the complex since Saturday.

“We had been made aware of their plans and when they arrived on Saturday they found our security and members of the SAPS Public Order unit waiting for them, they turned back.

However, when we called the police yesterday after we were told that the invaders were around the complex, the SAPS took long to respond. The invaders, many of whom were heavily armed, confronted the site manager [and] beat her up before forcing her to hand over the keys of the vacant units,” she said.

The R353 million housing project launched in 2014 was officially opened by former president Jacob Zuma in April last year.

Sixty percent of the R353 million came from a government housing grant while the balance was raised through loans.

“I think there is a misunderstanding; some people think that the fact that there is government grant money involved means that the complex is governmentowned. The fact of the matter is that the complex is owned by Capital City Housing, a private entity,” the manager said.

Yesterday’s invasion by liberation movements’ excombatants is not the first one in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

In 2000 Zimbabwe’s military veterans invaded farms in that country after accusing the government of failing to empower excombatants who were struggling to make a living.

Pietermaritzburg police spokesperson Sergeant Mthokozisi Ngobese said police can only move in to make arrests if a case had been opened.

“So far there is no case that has been opened,” he said.

By late yesterday afternoon the NPO’s lawyers were busy preparing an urgent application for an interdict.