

EDITOR'S VIEW

Finding solutions to land invasions

ONE of the major concerns of land owners and residents in many settled communities in Durban is the danger of land invasions which have heightened since the call by certain political parties for the expropriation of land without compensation.

While this newspaper supports moves for orderly and organised land reform that ensures a fair and equitable distribution of land, it is opposed to people illegally invading and occupying vacant land, causing tensions between the land invaders and neighbouring communities.

If left unchecked, these invasions, which are often organised and orchestrated by criminal elements, have the potential to escalate into ugly conflicts which our city authorities must move heaven and earth to avoid.

What people have to accept is that rapid unplanned urbanisation is now a worldwide phenomenon with millions of people migrating to the cities in search of jobs, water, electricity and housing. The UN Development Programme estimates that by 2050, more than two thirds of the world's population will be living in urban areas.

On the home front, the eThekweni municipal area is having to deal with over 237 000 households in informal settlements.

It is against this background that we cautiously welcome the initiative by the Department of Human Settlements and the eThekweni mayor's office in setting up the recent Informal Settlements Upgrade Summit with a number of key stakeholders.

The plan the summit has proposed is an ambitious one, but at least it's a start.

The three-pronged plan involves massive investments in so-called "greenfields" projects such as Cornubia and the KwaMashu Bridge City project; upgrading informal settlements with interim services like water, electricity and sanitation; and exploring the possibility of high rise structures for housing.

There's also the question of social facilitation which calls for engagement with all community structures, public education about taking care of government-funded facilities, advice on where and where not to construct informal houses and information about rehousing opportunities available.

While these projects are to be welcomed, they are more in the medium and long term. What is more urgently needed is a commitment by the Human Settlements MEC Ravi Pillay and eThekweni mayor, Zandile Gumede, to bring a halt to land invasions and the illegal occupation of homes.

And this must be done by negotiating with and engaging all parties concerned.

Meaningful solutions are possible if people engage constructively with each other and respect each other's rights in a climate of tolerance and peaceful co-existence.