

KZN to set up anti-land invasion unit

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THE KZN Human Settlements Department is setting up an anti-land invasion unit to combat the invasion of government land.

Department spokesperson Mbulelo Baloyi said they had gone out to tender to contract a service provider, and the talks were at an advanced stage.

He was speaking to *The Witness* on the sidelines of the department's budget debate in the provincial legislature yesterday, where MEC Ravi Pillay tabled his budget of R3,5 billion for the 2015/16 financial year.

The budget dealt with several issues including land invasions.

Baloyi said: "The unit will be set up to protect government property. Very often we find that land earmarked for government housing developments is invaded. This slows down the housing

projects. The unit will be tasked with ensuring that that is prevented.

"The department owns a significant number of properties and wishes to have a monitoring and preventative capacity for these pieces of land," he said.

Members of the legislature welcomed the efforts to curb land grabs.

DA MPL Hlanganani Gumbi warned that land grabs were being used by political parties as a tool to attract members.

Pillay addressed the issue saying the government would not allow the unilateral and unlawful occupation of land, "which, besides prejudicing the rightful beneficiaries of housing opportunities, leads to chaos and anarchy".

"Land invasions impact negatively on the housing delivery process, sometimes interrupting service delivery indefinitely," he continued.

Pillay said while they were neverthe-

less sympathetic to the plight of the poor, "We must also record our extreme concern at several instances of rank political opportunism".

He condemned land invasions and said the department would continue to use the law to safeguard state land and ensure that the service delivery mandate was not derailed by such illegal activities.

Pillay also issued a warning to municipalities that the department would no longer approve housing projects if bulk infrastructure had not been approved.

"The department will only approve housing projects if bulk infrastructure funding is confirmed through a council resolution and credible budgetary allocations. This will enable the department to avoid a situation where dwellings are constructed without services."

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