

27 March 2017

THE OCCUPIERS OF HELEN BOWDEN AND WOODSTOCK HOSPITAL: STATEMENT OF DEMANDS

Today we announce that we have embarked on a symbolic occupation of the Helen Bowden Nurses Home and the Woodstock Hospital to demand Urban Land Justice in Cape Town. We are Cape Town residents from across the race and class divide. We are residents of Woodstock, Sea Point, Marikana informal settlement, Blikkiesdorp and Khayelitsha. We are from communities at the forefront of the housing and segregation crisis in our city. We stand in solidarity with the struggles of all poor and working class people who still live homeless under bridges; in shacks and informal settlements at the edge of our city; in backyards and wendy houses on the Cape Flats; and in store rooms and domestic quarters in former white suburbs.

The colonial and apartheid governments divided our city, controlled where we could live and forcefully removed our families from their homes. Our parents and grandparents resisted and overcame racial oppression. They fought for the rights to dignity, justice, equality, and adequate housing that our Constitution now guarantees.

But we still experience the violence of apartheid spatial planning and segregation. A dignified life with access to good services and decent work is reserved for a few. We still experience violent evictions from our homes by private property owners and our government. This, while private landlords, developers and banks are making obscene profits. Land must be for people, not for profit.

We are angry that our City, our Province and our National governments have failed to acknowledge our struggles for land and for affordable housing. They have failed to bring Black and Coloured people back into our city.

We believe that symbolic and peaceful civil disobedience is now justified in the defence of our Constitution and our Constitutional rights. As we have now made our home here for over 48 hours, the law is clear that we may not be evicted without an order of court. We call on the Province and the South African Police Service to act lawfully and refrain from using violence or other tactics of state oppression against us. We call on the City and Province to engage us meaningfully on our demands:

1. Stop the sale of Tafelberg and build social housing.

Tafelberg is the test of Province's commitment to building affordable housing on well-located public land. This is feasible and affordable and the decision to sell was unlawful. We demand that Cabinet immediately stop the sale and build social housing on the site.

2. Immediately announce plans and timelines for affordable housing on Helen Bowden, Woodstock Hospital and other well-located public land.

No new affordable housing has been built in the inner city since apartheid. The Provincial Government states that it will release these two sites for affordable housing, yet there are no details on how many social housing units will be built. The Woodstock Hospital site has been cited as being feasible for Social Housing since 2012, just as the Tafelberg site was, but nothing has happened. Province must cancel plans to build new government offices at Woodstock Hospital. For many years, the Helen Bowden site provided subsidised housing to nurses at Somerset Hospital, and now stands vacant. We demand that the City, the Province and the National government declare all the land they own, make well-located land a priority for affordable housing, and commit all feasible land for affordable housing with timelines. We demand that no public land is sold until this happens.

We demand that Province stop all attempts at evicting tenants in existing public rental housing, such as at De Waal Drive, Naruna Estate and other rental housing stock.

3. Do not fire security guards looking after public land occupied.

The security guards who protect these occupied sites had no knowledge of our planned occupation and must not be fired or victimised in any way. We are aware of the fact that some of the security guards are breadwinners for their families and we commit ourselves to provide any necessary support needed by them if they are victimised or fired by their employers.

4. Regulate the private sector, protect tenants and evictees.

The City of Cape Town is doing nothing to stop unaffordable rents, violent private evictions and displacement of poor and working class people from the inner-city.

Meanwhile property developers are earning huge profits building expensive homes for wealthy people. We demand that the City regulate the private sector and force them to build affordable housing and pay for the relocation costs of evictees. We demand that the Rental Housing Tribunal, which is supposed to protect tenants' rights, is funded enough so it can do its work properly. The City, Province and National government should enforce the new Rental Housing Amendment Act and bring about rent control in Cape Town. Tax breaks for developers like the Urban Development Zone must include affordable housing conditions.

5. The City must stop building relocation camps and provide temporary alternative accommodation for evictees in their home communities.

The City of Cape Town is forcing people into relocation camps like Blikkiesdorp and Wolwerivier, far from job opportunities, good schools and reliable medical care. This is violent and dehumanising. This is a continuation of the colonial and apartheid project. We demand an end to the construction of such camps. We demand that the City provide alternative accommodation in well-located areas within 5 km of people's homes. The City of Cape Town must fund a dignified transitional housing programme for evictees.

6. Provide security of tenure and upgrade informal settlements

In informal settlements across the city, we have been living on public land for decades without security of tenure. Communities like Khayelitsha and many others are not temporary but the City has no plans to provide permanent sanitation and infrastructure. We demand that the city immediately recognise the security of tenure of residents living in all informal settlements and put in place plans to upgrade them.

7. Expropriate private land and buildings for housing

Many of us have lived on private land for decades, where the City refuses to provide permanent services. We demand that the state must expropriate private land where people are already living, as at Marikana, so that these residents may have secure tenure and have services delivered to their communities. The example of Marikana informal settlement is but one of many.

8. Give back District Six

Thousands in our city were forcibly removed and displaced from well-located land under the Group Areas Act during apartheid. We demand that no more land is sold to private profit driven developers in District Six and that it is given back to former residents and poor and working-class the people of Cape Town.

9. Affordable housing for the elderly, the homeless and immigrant families.

Current government housing programmes do not provide adequate assistance to pensioners, homeless people or immigrants who do not have permanent residency. The housing rights of these vulnerable groups must be realised and protected. We demand that government reassess housing programmes for these vulnerable groups who are falling through the cracks and come up with a solution to protect their housing rights.

10. Meaningful engagement with communities

Government must engage meaningfully and honestly with communities. Government must treat communities with dignity and respect, and take communities' voices seriously. There are, for instance, plans to relocate families at Blikkiesdorp, Pine Road (Woodstock), and Naruna Estate (Plumstead). Yet, government has not consulted and listened to these communities properly.