

# Protest about over homes handover

## Imbali residents try to block mayor

**NOKUTHULA NTULI**

MAYOR Themba Njilo's good deed was met with some resistance from a handful of Imbali residents who tried to stop the handover of houses to destitute families by blocking the road to the housing project yesterday.

The project, which was funded by the Themba Njilo Foundation and the business community, saw five families receiving keys to their fully-furnished two-bedroom homes yesterday. The protesters burnt logs, saying they were not consulted before the houses were built and had hoped their children would use the previously vacant land to build their own homes. Some said they did not want strangers coming into their community. Others were under the impression that the houses were part of a government housing project.

MEC for Human Settlement Ravi Pillay calmed the angry group and apologised that there was no proper public consultation.

"These houses were not built with government money. They were built by a foundation with donations so government did not have direct control on the houses that were built.

"The same government cannot say no when people put money to build houses, we appreciate those things," he said.

Ward councillor Dumisani Phungula committed to call a community meeting in two weeks to discuss the development projects planned for the area. "I will also be sending my head of department to that meeting," said Pillay.

Njilo said he did not understand why some people were against the project as some of the beneficiaries were from Imbali. He said building houses for the poor has been part of the work of the foundation for more than two decades.

"Lending a helping hand to the poor is not something new for me. This project was in the planning stages way before I became a mayor. I put in my own money and ask for donations from the business communi-

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ty where I need help. We have built and furnished more than 45 houses across the province with no complaints from communities," he said.

Njilo said he would not dismiss the local community's concerns, but hoped they found it in their hearts to welcome their new neighbours.

"We still have another 17 houses in the works but things are not going as fast as I'd hoped because I now have mayoral commitments and this is more of a personal project. But MEC Pillay has also committed to assist the foundation and for that I'm really grateful," he said.

One of the beneficiaries, Bongive

Khasibe (46), said it broke her heart when she saw some of her neighbours protesting when she thought they would have been celebrating with her. Khasibe, who is wheelchair-bound, and her 14-year-old daughter, Noluthando, lived in a one-room shack in Imbali.

She could not use the toilet outside her house because of the steep path. "I relieve myself in a bucket and my daughter then go and dumps it in the toilet," she said, tearing up.

She said the roof on her shack has gaping holes and all their clothes and blankets became soaked even when there was a slight drizzle.

Khasibe said she had become a laughing stock to some of her neighbours, who accused her of being a negligent mother who was not deserving of her child as she could not even provide shelter. "My pension was not enough to build us a house because R500 of my pension goes towards paying for scholar transport every month. Then we have to buy food, prepaid electricity and I have to regularly go to the doctor because I'm not well," she said.

Khasibe and other beneficiaries said they were grateful to Njilo.

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Msunduzi Mayor Themba Njilo (left) and MEC for Human Settlement Ravi Pillay with beneficiaries of the mayoral village housing project, Bongive Khasibe and her daughter, Noluthando Khasibe.