

NEWS

Group Area blitz

6 000 face bleak Christmas after new flatland crackdown

ABOUT 6 000 Indian, coloured and African people in 70 blocks of flats in central Durban face an uncertain Christmas after visits from the police and demands from landlords yesterday.

Representatives of 70 buildings in white areas that have tenants of colour will meet at the Ecumenical Centre, St Andrews Street tonight.

A police spokesman confirmed visits

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were made to a number of blocks.

"We only act when we get complaints or when people make written statements, and it is only then we investigate cases under the Group Areas Act," said the spokesman.

The residents will meet to work out a strategy on how to handle moves to prosecute flat dwellers of colour.

As residents thought they could relax after the Group Areas Amendment Bill was referred back to Parliament from the President's Council, police visited a number of blocks around Albert Park including Cape Fair, Wellington and Provincial.

Residents in Drummond House, Seabrook and Bridlington have been told by letting agents to leave.

Residents at Tabora and Arusha flats are anxiously awaiting the decision of the Attorney General after police submitted dockets about their living in a white group area.

People had been forced to move from Ron Vista, said the chairman of the Durban Central Residents' Association, Mr Sayed Iqbal Mohammed.

He said there had been a lull in

police and landlord activities until now.

"Now suddenly, the Group Areas Act Unit has been visiting blocks of flats again, and is taking statements from residents. Some landlords have issued notices for them to quit or be prosecuted," said Mr Mohammed.

He said the association's offices were inundated by frightened residents who feared they would be thrown out into the streets at a time when the city was bustling with thousands of holiday-makers — which would make it impossible to get accommodation even in hotels.

"We have alerted our lawyers to stand by to take any action against any of the residents to court, even if it means applying for urgent interdicts," said Mr Mohammed.

He said the sudden police and landlord action had caught many residents by surprise, but his office was setting up an emergency service.

Landlords and letting agents were not available for comment yesterday. But some supervisors said the owners did not want to evict the people of colour but would lose their properties if they did not act against "disqualified" tenants.