

8 000 ARE OUT ON THE STREETS

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A survey has exposed the dangers faced by the estimated 8 000 people who live on the streets in Durban's city centre.

The streets of Durban are home for 8 000 people who brave rain and wind, exhaust fumes and treacherous traffic in a bid to be close to uncertain economic opportunity.

Their homes are little more than worn plastic sheets, their beds stacks of newspapers, and the fruit and vegetables, herbal remedies or plastic drums they sell net them from about R5 a day.

This is the lot of Durban's pavement dwellers who have escaped poverty or violence in the rural or semi-rural areas to eke out an existence.

A recent survey by the Organisation of Civic Rights, which has been campaigning to have the city provide adequate housing for the pavement dwellers, found the number of pavement dwellers stood at around 8 000 in nine "settlements".

OCR chairman Sayed Iqbal Mohamed said the survey showed most of them would not be able to afford decent accommodation, most could not afford to leave the streets and most were victims of crime.

He said: "From intensive meetings over the past eight months with various relevant departments of the councils and key figures, it was evident that there are no plans, no vision and no reaction and interaction between the policy makers, department heads and the homeless communities except for the 'muti' sellers. This survey hopes to start a dialogue between the parties concerned."

A 1990 study by the OCR, then known as the Durban Central Residents Association, estimated 2 000 people were living on the pavements. Seven years later, that population had increased fourfold.

Findings concluded that most of the pavement dwellers were women, 59% of those polled were single, 25% married, 9% widowed and 7% divorced.

Sixty-five percent had attended school.

Most (37%) cited economic hardship as their reason for living on the streets.

Most said they could afford between R10 and R50 a month for housing. A few could pay no rental.

Mr Mohamed said it was time all concerned people and organisations got involved in working with the homeless on the city streets.

"While the central government's vision of accommodation for all by the year 2000 is now not possible, the south and north central local authorities in particular must look at imaginative ways to urgently accommodate Durban's homeless."