

Residents refuse to vacate flats to make way for student accommodation

JANINE MOODLEY

THE tenants of three blocks of flats in Warwick Avenue are refusing to vacate the premises after they were issued with eviction notices to make room for student accommodation.

The 29 families of the flats, situated on Syringa Avenue, say they will fight tooth and nail as this is the only home they have known.

Three months ago, a month's notice was served to residents of Bailey Court, Krishna Court and Rosemont Court.

Youlene Johns, 44, a school secretary, who has lived at Rosemont Court for 18 years, said it was unfair that the landlord and owner, ME Bassa, wanted to kick them out, especially after they had been promised an option to buy the flats.

"The landlord held an informal meeting with us last May. He said he was getting old and wanted to sell the building. He said we could buy the flats at R75 000 per unit. Some of us were excited and I, for one, was prepared to pay the amount," said Johns.

But in November the tenants were served with the eviction no-



RESIDENTS of three blocks of flats in Syringa Avenue in the Warwick Avenue Triangle talk to Sayed Iqbal Mohamed, chairperson of the Organisation for Civic Rights.

PICTURE: ZANELE ZULU AFRICAN NEWS AGENCY (ANA)

tices. They were apparently told the building would now accommodate students.

Concerned they would be out on the streets, Johns held a tenant meeting and contacted the chairperson of the Organisation of Civic Rights, Sayed Iqbal Mohamed. He said that while he

understood the need for student accommodation, families should not have to suffer as a result.

"We believe that since tertiary institutions are paying for student accommodation - inflated rentals, at that - some landlords' greed has made them oblivious to the suffering evictions are causing."

He said the rent-to-own principle should have been implemented in the area years ago, with subsidies offered to enable residents to become flat owners.

"Instead, we are seeing wealthy property developers moving in and displacing entire families."

He said he wrote to the landlord, complaining about eight private security personnel, some allegedly armed, who tried to forcibly remove several tenants.

Mohamed said the security guards left when the tenants demanded to see court orders that stipulated they must be evicted.

They had allegedly mentioned they were acting on the instructions of a Mahmood Limalia, who was leasing the building from Bassa and who intended buying the property to convert into a student residence.

Bassa said he would investigate.

Limalia denied forcing residents out of their homes, but said he was offering a stipend to those who agreed to move out.

eThekweni Municipality spokesperson Msawakhe Mayisela said it had no ties to the property. It was a matter those involved had to sort out.

Eviction notice distress

NADIA KHAN

RESIDENTS living in a block of flats in Overport, Durban, are scrambling to find new homes after they received a letter to evacuate the premises at the end of February, allegedly to make way for student accommodation.

Many of them have lived at Westpark Heights, on West Road, for four decades.

The residents, who declined to be named for fear of reprisal, said if they do not move out by February 28, legal action would be taken against them.

A married father of three said the estate agent, to whom they had paid their rent to had allegedly told him that their belongings would be left on the roadside if they did not vacate their homes.

"This is the kind of inhumane treatment we receive. They gave us the letters in mid-January and expect us to move out so quickly. There are rumours they will be turning the flats into student accommodation."

The man, 40, said their lives would be disrupted by the sudden move.

Another resident, who has lived

at the flat for more than four decades, said they were provided with a list of alternate buildings.

But it required deposits which ranged from R6550 (North Beach) to R38300 (Riverside).

"They think they are doing us a favour by providing a list of other places we can go to. They do not realise that many of the tenants are pensioners or from single-income households."

Iqbal Mohamed, chairperson of the Organisation for Civic Rights, said it would be questioning the validity of the evacuation notice and the reason for wanting vacant occupation of the building.

"We have met the tenants and given them assurance that we are going to act against this notice.

"This is not going to be a case where, like at other flats, tenants moved out or were finally evicted through a court order," Mohamed said.

The owner of Westpark Heights referred **POST** to his attorney, who could not be reached for comment at the time of publication.