Dolomite Squatters Relocated To Benoni

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New, safer home for Bapsfontein residents

Pretoria - Three thousand Bapsfontein residents, who had been living on unstable and dangerous dolomitic land, have all been moved to a safer location.

The Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality wrapped the process of relocating the residents last week, moving the families and their belongings to Mayfield and Putfontein in Benoni.

The move became necessary when in November last year, the Bapsfontein informal settlement was declared a local disaster area in terms of section 55 of the Disaster Management Act due to dolomite instability. It was found that the residents were living in an area that was not safe for human settlement.

The relocation of families began in December 2010, and should have been concluded in the middle of February but was delayed by a number of factors, including unfavorable weather conditions and resistance from certain quarters of the community, the municipality said.

Some residents, with the help of Lawyers for Human Rights, took the municipality to the High Court, claiming that the move was unlawful and there had been no proper consultation.

On 11 March, the court, after hearing representations from both sides, dismissed the case with costs on the grounds that this was a disaster issue which placed people's lives in danger, making the relocations necessary, added the municipality.

The relocations then resumed last week Monday and by Thursday, all the residents had been relocated.

"This has been a tough operation from day one, but the team remained focused and committed because we knew that the situation we were dealing with was unusual and extremely sensitive, and needed to be treated with great care," Ekurhuleni spokesperson Zweli Dlamini said.

The area would be sealed off to ensure the land was not invaded again. The municipality has also put in place 24-hour security in Bapsfontein.

- BuaNews