

Land occupiers in Parkwood say they've waited 16 years

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MEC Bonginkosi Madikizela to meet backyard dwellers on Tuesday

By Mary-Anne Gontsana

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Backyarders from Parkwood marked plots and attempted to occupy vacant land over the weekend. Photo: Ashraf Hendricks

Protests broke out on Sunday and continued on Monday between police and land occupiers in Parkwood in Cape Town's south peninsula. GroundUp saw people stoning a passing beverage delivery truck on Prince George Drive on Monday morning.

On vacant land at Walmer Road a group of people huddled near a few burning tyres to keep warm. Plots had been demarcated with wooden poles and tape.

Chairperson of the Parkwood Backyarders Association Dominique Booyesen said they started the occupation on Friday. "We were peaceful. We had even handed a memorandum to our ward

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councillor about our housing needs on Saturday.”

She said violence erupted on Sunday in retaliation after “the police started literally kicking people off the land”.

A municipal office in Parkwood was set alight and looted. The floor was strewn with documents. Computers were stolen, said a City employee.

“We do not want any violence. As you can see, even now we are quiet, just sitting, doing our own thing ... Some of us [including herself] have been backyarders for more than 16 years,” said Booyesen.

Masnoena Samsodien said she had also been a backyarder for 16 years. “What pains me is that I thought I was on a housing waiting list all this time, only to find out I wasn’t. We were tricked when politicians came here campaigning saying that they are registering us ... I am still waiting for a house.”

Some of the land occupiers said they pay as much as R3,500 and R4,000 to rent a Wendy house or shack in a backyard.

In a statement, the Western Cape Department of Human Settlements said, “While we respect the people’s right to protest, violence and destruction cannot be tolerated.”

The department confirmed that the provincial minister Bonginkosi Madikizela had received a memorandum of grievances from the Parkwood councillor.

“The Minister engaged the leadership of the area and it was agreed that a meeting to help find solutions for Parkwood be held on Tuesday 22 May,” said Ntomboxolo Makoba-Somdaka, spokesperson for Madikizela.



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This municipal office in Parkwood was torched and looted on Sunday. Photo: Ashraf Hendricks

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