

Mitchell's Plain land grab clashes escalate

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Live ammunition was fired at police during a second day of violent clashes with groups of Mitchell's Plain backyard dwellers who have invaded land in Tafelsig and refuse to leave.

Bricks and rocks were also thrown at police, who responded with rubber bullets, teargas and a water cannon.

The clashes followed land invasions next to the Swartklip Road sports field and an open piece of land near Kapteinsklip train station in Tafelsig on Friday and Saturday. The City's Anti-Land Invasion Unit demolished hundreds of structures the backyarders erected during the invasion, leading to a tense stand-off.

On Monday, scores of residents pelted police with stones and set fire to tyres in bushes when officers arrived at the stretch of land along Swartklip Road, and which residents have named New Horizons.

On a wall leading to the settlement, the name New Horizons was spray-painted near the words: "Whe shal not be moved"(sic).

As officers moved around the settlement, a few residents could be seen running towards officers, threatening to use live ammunition. Two young men had handguns and could be seen shooting at police.

They bragged afterwards they had fired at the officers.

As a police helicopter hovered, a police water cannon sprayed jets of bright blue water at residents and a number of teargas grenades were lobbed at the residents throwing rocks and stones.

Eighteen people, including police officers and children, were injured and at least 14 residents arrested since Sunday.

On Monday, as police were shooting at the invaders, a man could be seen running away with a bleeding neck wound.

A policeman could also be seen bleeding from a cheek.

Plumes of thick, black smoke rose in the air as residents burnt tyres and bushes on dunes alongside the field.

Residents gathered at the top of the dunes as police in armoured vehicles and officers with riot shields approached.

"The police can try and kill us or force us away, but we will be back and stay here," screamed a resident, who was hit by a rubber bullet.

Mitchell's Plain police spokeswoman Mugelaine van der Vent said officers had been called to Tafelsig, and while they were there shots had been fired at them.

"Police fired rubber bullets and teargas to disperse to crowd," she said,

Following a brief visit to a field nearby New Horizons, Cape Town mayor Dan Plato said he believed the invasions were politically motivated and set up to happen just before tomorrow's local government elections.

"It's so close to the elections that I have to say it's politically motivated. It's well-timed ahead of the elections," he said.

City of Cape Town spokesman Pieter Cronje said only five of about 400 illegally erected structures were still at the Swartklip Road invasion site.

He said the city's law enforcement officers and metro police were there in support of police, who led the operation.

"We are preparing for a possible eviction order or for an interdict. The city has had reports, but cannot confirm, that it seems the invasion was well organised.

"There are allegations that there was a meeting on Thursday evening at the Freedom Park Hall where the occupation was discussed. The timing (of the occupation) seems significant.

"We reacted with calm as it is in nobody's interest to have another Hangberg (in Hout Bay, where residents clashed with police trying to evict them and to demolish their informal homes in September)," Cronje said.

Asked if the city would probe the allegations, he said: "We have a 24/7 fraud and corruption hotline and we appeal to people and those who had been offered something that is too good to be true, to report it." - Cape Times