

## Victory for evicted tenants in Durban

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**IT was a sweet victory for Westpoint Lodge tenants in Durban yesterday when the high court granted them an interim order to have electricity and water restored to the 12-storey building.**

The residents, represented by the Legal Resources Centre, locked horns with the eThekweni municipality and KwaZulu-Natal department of human settlements and demanded that the basic services be restored.

They had been living without lights and water for more than a month since their services were disconnected on January 25.

"We can have a hot bath, we can cook and we will not be afraid to walk in the dark corridors anymore," West Point Lodge committee spokesperson Valerie Govender said.

"The MEC has lost and we have won. She was not being humane when she said we had to live like we have been living for all this time."

But the tenants still have an eviction order issued by the department of human settlements last month hanging over their heads.

They have been caught in the middle of an ownership battle of the building that was illegally bought by the then KwaZulu-Natal department of housing at an inflated price.

The officials involved in the deal were jailed in 2006. For seven years property manager Anesh Maharaj has been collecting rent for the building, which he says earned him "no profits at all".

That was until KwaZulu-Natal MEC for human settlements and public works Maggie Govender stepped in, kicked Maharaj out and issued the tenants with an eviction order in addition to cutting off their electricity and water supply.

Backed by the Organisation of Civic Rights (OCR) and the Legal Resources Centre, the tenants could not contain their joy at the victory.

Sayed Iqbal Mohamed of ORC said: "While this interim order is a victory for the tenants, it would be a hollow one if the department of human settlements does not reconsider its obstinate stance.

"Seeking to displace people is contrary to its mandate since there is a constitutional duty as well as a duty imposed by the Housing Act to provide shelter."

Mahendra Chetty of the Legal Resource Centre said plans were afoot to fight the eviction order.