

Department of Human Settlements works towards improved rental relationships

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thenewage.co.za
26 August 2011*

The department of human settlements says it has resolved 147 out of 158 registered landlord-tenants disputes during the 2010/2011 financial year.

It says the remaining 11 cases could not be speedily resolved due to the non-availability of representatives during the mediation processes but that the cases were receiving serious attention.

The department's acting director of communications, Freddy Ngobe, released a statement saying the department's efforts to maintain and foster a stable relationship between landlords and tenants were progressing well.

"The department of human settlements is pulling out every stop to sustain good relationships between tenants and their landlords in the rental housing sector," the statement said.

Ngobe said the department was calling on the public to make use of this "free service" in order to create an enabling environment within the rental sector.

"Affected parties are urged to follow the correct procedures when a dispute arises. This can be done by either the landlord or the tenant lodging a complaint to the Rental Housing Tribunal directorate," Ngobe said.

He said among the most unfair practices were situations where landlords refused to refund deposits to their tenants after the end of the contract, unfair evictions and lock-outs.

The tribunal had the authority to arrange for mediation between the tenant and the landlord. Ngobe explained that in the case of mediation between the parties, the mediator could only advise both parties but did not have the power to make a ruling.

He said the ruling of the tribunal was deemed to be the judgment of a magistrate's court. Ngobe added that landlords and tenants should know about legal requirements of residential letting and were encouraged to educate themselves to avoid negative consequences of unfair rental practices.

"The Rental Housing Act (of 1999) provides a broad framework on how to operate and gives both parties the opportunity to present their cases and put forward any relevant evidence before the tribunal," he said.

Complaints could be lodged through the forms obtainable at the department's regional offices and all municipal offices.