



The ACLA at Charlestown. Left to right: Professor Richard van der Ross, Professor Harriet Ngubane, Professor Nic Olivier, Justice T van Reenen and Mr NJ Kotze.

ACLA comes to Natal...



Members of the Roosboom community listen to their representatives give evidence to ACLA.

THE government-appointed Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA) recently held two public hearings on land claims in Natal.

The Roosboom public hearing was held at the Ladysmith Town Hall on August 18 and the Charlestown public hearing was held at Charlestown on August 19.

At the hearings, the land claiming communities said they were working with ACLA under certain conditions and that they would use other means to get back their land if ACLA could not deliver.

Members of ACLA would not say when they would advise the state president

about what should happen to the land being claimed. However, communities made it clear that they wanted a positive answer to their claim and would not be prepared to wait long for this.

At the Charlestown hearing, Mr Raubenheimer, chief director of the NPA's Community Services Department said the NPA would not support land that is being claimed at Charlestown falling under a separate local authority. This was suggested by the Development Services Board (DSB) in its evidence to ACLA.

Mr Raubenheimer said the Provincial And Local Authorities Act, passed in

July this year, gave his Administrator the power to put things together, not to pull them apart. "So, the NPA cannot support cutting Clavis from Charlestown," he said.

Commenting on the legal status of the land being claimed in Charlestown, he said that technically it is now owned by the Development Services Board (DSB). "But," he added, "the DSB is a creature of the state, under the Administrator of Natal."

He added that he was confident the "headache" could be unravelled.

☞ *Community experiences, as told to ACLA, on pages 4 to 10*

"In our own words..."

Our school was destroyed



Mrs Ethel Hlatshwayo tells of the pain at seeing the oldest school at Roosboom demolished.

Mrs Hlatshwayo was a scholar and then a teacher at the St Hilda's Girls' High School in Roosboom. When the Roosboom community was removed to Ezakheni in 1976, St Hilda's was completely destroyed by the government.

I want to tell people how I felt when the school at Roosboom was demolished. St Hilda's Girls' High School was founded by Ellen Margaret Cooke, who came from England.

"Her aim was to help the African girls in the community of Roosboom and places around. Girls from all over the Union flocked to this school.

"She established a day school, an intermediate school and a high school. She also established a domestic science school and a spinning and weaving department to try to help African girls become able to help earn a living.

"The portion of land where this school was, was offered to Ellen Margaret Cooke by my ancestor, John Khumalo.

"This school was a help, not only to Roosboom girls, but the whole of Natal, Transvaal and the Orange Free State, for here girls could learn to cook, sew, spin and weave and received a good knowledge of English.

"I was a scholar at this school and I also became one of the staff in the domestic science department.

"In 1959 Dr Verwoerd, then prime minister, came to visit the school. As usual, all the work done by the school was displayed for the visitors to see. To our

dissapointment, we learnt that the prime minister had come to declare the closure of St Hilda's Girls' School. Dr Verwoerd said there were factories where the things we produced at the school were machine-made. He also said that Bantu Education was to be introduced and Afrikaans taught.

"For me, it meant that I would not be able to teach, since I did not have knowledge of Afrikaans and Bantu Education.

"In 1976 we were moved to Ezakheni and our land became wasted land. Buildings were broken down. At St Hilda's everything was destroyed. The plots we owned - I had land given me by my ancestors - were taken away.

"When we moved to Ezakheni it affected our community, especially the younger generation. There was loss of respect. We had to mingle with people who were not of our standard.

"Nevertheless, above all that has happened, we're now eager to return to Roosboom - old as we are. Our hope is for our poor children and grandchildren to go back to Roosboom. That is what I pray for every day, that they may go back to the land of our ancestors."

"In our own words..."

The story of Elliot Mngadi

by Peter Brown, former AFRA chairperson

I first got to know Elliot Mngadi, a leading figure in Roosboom, on a visit to Roosboom in 1953. Roosboom was a hardworking, law-abiding, vibrant, essentially unified community. It might not have looked very pretty from the outside, but you had to get inside to know what it was like.

"When Joseph Khumalo leased Roosboom with an option to buy, he decided to buy in 1907 to make tenure more secure. He didn't have the money to do this on his own, so he got a group of friends together and they formed a syndicate. One of the men in the syndicate was Elliot Mngadi's father.

"Elliot grew up and went to school there - St Hilda's College For Girls. If you were a small enough boy, St Hilda's would take you. He grew up with the same moral background and support which Mrs Hlatshwayo referred to.

"Elliot's father couldn't afford to send him to high school so he went to Johannesburg, where he worked in a kitchen and went to night school. He then worked in a store and worked himself up to be storeman.

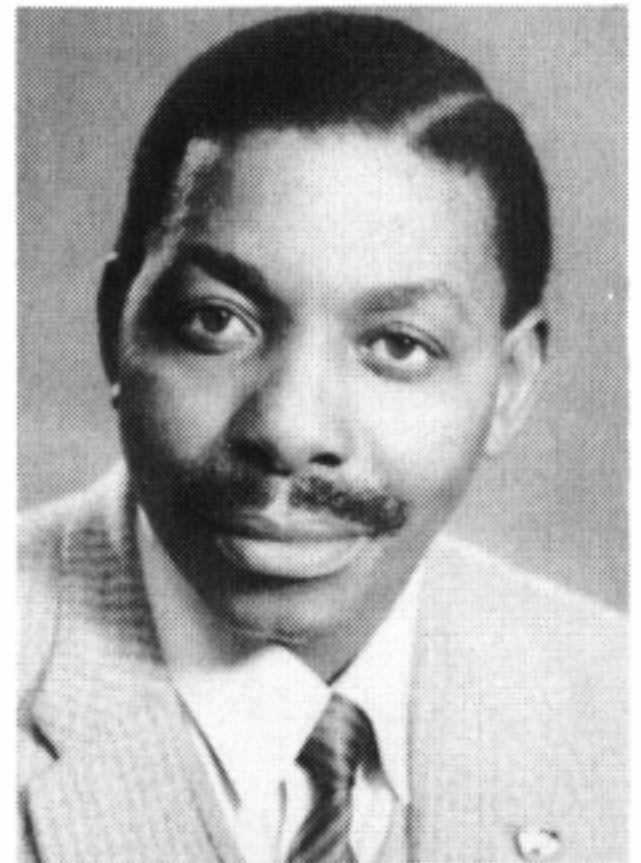
"In the late 1940s he married and returned to live at Roosboom. He got a job as Messenger of the Court for the Ladysmith District.

"When apartheid policies began to have effect and resettlement started, Elliot left his job as Messenger of the Court and became an organiser among black freehold communities, committed to fighting resettlement. At the centre of the resettlement policy was Roosboom. Roosboom had 570 houses, five churches, three schools, two shops, two cemeteries and a dip.

"In 1964 Elliot organised a conference, attended by more than 1 000 delegates from 'black spots' in Natal. The conference sent an appeal to the government to end 'black spot' removals. The government's response was to ban Elliot.

"He was confined to the Ladysmith District and opened a tearoom. Then he was removed from Roosboom - from two four-roomed houses to a single room tin shack and tent in Ezakheni.

"He was offered compensation which he challenged in court. It took the state one year to reply to his claim. In the end he was paid two and a half times the amount he was originally offered. He was the only Roosboom person who challenged the compensation paid out. Everyone else in the community was too demoralised."



Mr Elliot Mngadi as a young man. He was a leading figure in Roosboom's struggle against removal.

Elliot Mngadi fought against forced removal all his life. He suffered a banning order and eventual removal for his resistance. Elliot Mngadi died in 1990, before the Land Acts and Group Areas Act were scrapped. The possibility of Roosboom people getting their land back seemed a distant dream then. Today, it might come true...

"In our own words..."

Let me die at Roosboom



Mrs Agnes Sokhule, former resident of Roosboom, now living in Ezakheni.

Mrs Sokhulu tells of the injury people suffered during the Removal of the Roosboom community. She also tells of damage to property and how people saw their land being leased out to white farmers for grazing.

Before we were moved from Roosboom, several meetings were called. The worst one was at Gwala Gwala Store.

"While we were waiting for the officials, we saw a stream of army vehicles approaching. People ran helter skelter. Some, who were carrying babies on their backs dropped these babies, others fell into dongas in the rush to get away. Many people were hurt.

"After that, a message was sent to the community that we would be moved.

"On the day of the removal, there was heavy and continuous rain, so the vehicles didn't come. After the rains stopped the removals started.

"Some people didn't know the removals were taking place because they were at work.

"If you didn't hurry home, you'd find your house on fire with your belongings still inside. The white people in the trucks set the houses alight. The whites who came to remove us were armed.

"I had some puppies and a dog. While I was collecting my belongings, one of the white people went up to them and took one of the puppies and walked away.

"I became very annoyed. I was so angry that I went up to him and snatched away the puppy. When I

did that he turned to me and said: 'What are you doing, you bloody kaffir!' But he did nothing.

"Then, when I was loading my belongings and my dog and the puppies into the truck, I heard the same white tell the others what I had done. I became afraid and thought that maybe I would die because of trying to protect my puppies.

"At a certain spot the whites gave the people of Roosboom money and told us to leave. No one knew what the money was for.

"In Roosboom we had different sized pieces of land. My land was half an acre but I could survive on it through growing vegetables.

"When we were removed from Roosboom we thought the government was going to develop the land there. Instead, we only saw livestock grazing on our land. Some of our land was even leased to white farmers.

"All that we want is for the Commission to hear our appeal and that we'll be able to go back.

"We will not forget. I myself would be very happy if I could die and be buried at Roosboom, old as I am."

"In our own words..."

Government must solve our problems

I was born and brought up in Charlestown. According to my knowledge, Charlestown was divided into three parts - Charlestown, Clavis and Clavis Extension. I was living at Clavis.

"I remember that there were booklets we used for paying rent. After a long time, these booklets were collected. They have never been returned, up to now. These booklets would be used as proof of purchase. Rents were paid for about 10 years, after which the owner of the booklet would be regarded as the owner of the land.

"In 1953 we saw many firms established in Clavis. Then, these firms said we had to have permits. The residents of Charlestown stood up against the permits.

"After that, we saw many lorries coming into the place. These lorries came and went further until they reached the end of Clavis. The people in the lorries started building shacks there.

"Nobody among the residents knew anything about those shacks. We only heard rumours that the shacks were being built for us so that we could be removed while the municipality built better houses for us.

"The community met and decided to take the

matter to court. As a result, the shacks were removed.

"Some time afterwards the lorries came back. The lorries kept on coming until we were all eventually removed to Ozisweni. The removal was very painful. While you were collecting your goods, a bulldozer would come and flatten your house. There were people carrying guns who said if we didn't move away our houses would be burnt. Some houses were burnt.

"When we came to Ozisweni we found a shack with one room. Most of our property was soaked in water because we were removed during the rainy season.

"At Clavis, I had a five-roomed house on a half and acre plot. At Ozisweni, it was this one-roomed shack, which we were not allowed to extend. At Charlestown I paid R1 in rent. At Ozisweni this went up to R8.39. There were also no jobs. After our removal from Charlestown, the factories moved to Newcastle.

"I'm pleased that today the government has sent the Commission to listen to our complaints. We hope our problems will be solved. "



Mrs Anna Mntanzi 58 year old former resident of Charlestown.

Mrs Mntanzi remembers the booklets in which Clavis tenants' rent payments were recorded. There was an agreement that after about 10 years, tenants who had been paying rent would be regarded as the owners of the land

"In our own words..."

Our persecution must end



Mrs Jabula Agnes Khoza says the Charlestown people's persecution must end.

Mrs Khoza was working at a factory in Charlestown on the day of the removal. She was fetched from the factory and when she got home, she had little time to pack all the family's belongings.

I hope that today we will come to the end of our persecution. I was born on July 28 1947. I started schooling here in Charlestown at various churches until the time when I got to high school.

"On the day of the removal, I was at work in the factory. I had an old lady looking after my children.

"Those of us who were at work were fetched. We had guns pointed at us.

"When I reached home I found it chained and there was a Caterpillar pulling the chain. People were taking goods out of the house.

"When you said you wanted to remove things from the rafters, the men who came to remove us would not agree. Food fell onto the ground. Then we got onto lorries.

"When we arrived on the other side, we found open land, no fences.

"We were put into this one-roomed shack - a family of six children, mother and father, kitchenware, dining room furniture, bedroom furniture. We failed to squeeze ourselves and our property in.

"So, we had to leave our property outside in the rain. We had no relatives with whom we could store our things.

"The children and women slept inside. Husbands slept outside.

"We had no food, as this had been spilt in the removal. We were given small packets of mielie meal and soup. But we had nothing with which to make a fire.

"Most painful was that there was a school in Charlestown.

"In the new place there was no school, no shops. We had a problem. And we still have a problem.

"Most of us are unemployed because of the distance to the factories. If you go to look for work, you must be able to pay R4 a day for transport.

"If you don't have that money, you can't look for work.

"This year we are paying more than R16 for rent. It is raised time and again. We would be very pleased if we could return to Charlestown."

"In our own words..."

We have our title deeds

I'm one of those who lived and worked in Charlestown. I was fetched twice by the police from the factory where I was working. "When I tried to explain that the land was mine and that I didn't want to move, the reply was: 'Put that land on wheels and go with it'.

"While I was in Johannesburg, I got a phone call from my brother asking me to come home. When I got home I was imprisoned. I was 60 years old and had never even entered a court before. I was tried for five days and on the sixth day they said I was being prosecuted for trespassing.

"I was placed in difficulties because even when you said you didn't want to move they would get in and take you out of your house. The women told me this while I was in prison.

"They said they would take the people and put them in a truck. Everything in the house would be collected by people who were not driving the trucks.

"We lost a lot of our property and, in my case, I found my cattle scattered all over the place. I had a lot of cattle.

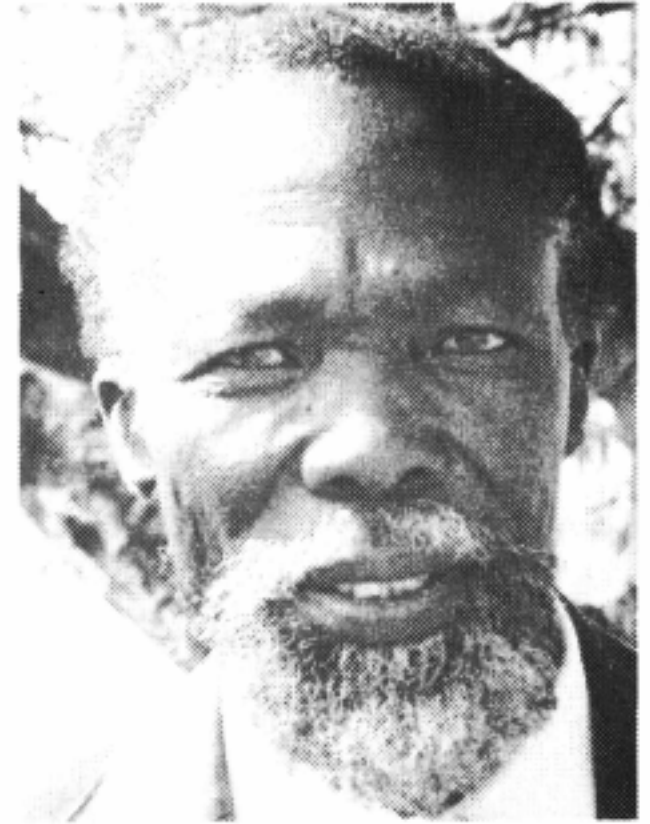
"It's not true that the removal took place from 1975 to 1977. I was removed in 1978.

"What was most painful was that the schools were

destroyed before the removal was complete. We had to send our children to different places because everything was so confused.

"Afterwards our properties were leased to other people. Our cattle were impounded and placed in camps here in Clavis. After six months they were moved to Voklsrust. We had no money to pay to get them out of the pound.

"We want restoration of our land - the land that was bought by our forefathers and for which we have title deeds. We have them even now. There is grazing on this land. Our youth will come back because they see the good of the development we will carry out here. This is what they have told us. This is what they will do..."



Mr Solomon Makhubu, 75 years old and still fighting for his land at Charlestown.

Mr Solomon Makhubu is chairperson of the Bambisanani Bathengi Charlestown Committee, the body that has been coordinating former residents' struggle to regain their land rights in Charlestown.



Mr Solomon Makhubu, pointing to the factory in Charlestown where he once worked. After the Charlestown community's removal, the factory closed down.

"In our own words..."

Our ancestors graves are at Charlestown



Mr Zwane, vice-chair of the Bambisanani Bathengi Charlestown Committee.

On top of all the pain and ill-will done by the government to the community, we are saying: 'It has been a long time for us staying with a wound that oozes pus'. Therefore, we are saying to this Commission that it recommend to the state president that this wound will spread over if it is not treated with suitable medicines.

"The return of the land is the first thing to happen. Following very close to that is the return of our title deeds, as they were.

"There must be no delays in returning our title deeds. We don't want the government to say that there is a law to be proclaimed before we get our title deeds. The government can do that on its own.

We have our ancestors' graves at Charlestown. They should not be lonely there.

"Sometimes we become sick because our navel cords are at this place. I hope that this is the final stage in this struggle for our land and that what will follow here is the return of our land.

This Commission has to make it happen by telling the state president that the owners of the land want it back.

"If this Commission is really committed, we hope that Charlestown people will be talking on their land within a short time. Here we are talking of the land that we have title deeds to.

"The responsibility of the Commission is to recommend to the state president that Charlestown returns to its owners."

"The return of our land must be the first thing to happen. Following very close that is the return of our title deeds, as they were. There must be no delay in returning our title deeds. The government must not say that there is a law to be proclaimed before we get our title deeds."



The Bambisanani Bathengi Charlestown Committee, coordinating the struggle for Charlestown to return to forcibly removed people.