

Alcockspruit land claim hearing

“We are not coming cap in hand”



Mr Horatius Mabaso and Mr Amos Bhengu from Alcockspruit in front of the Alcockspruit church. The church took the community 30 years to build. It was vandalised when the community were forcibly removed in 1969. Besides return of their land, the community wants the government to restore buildings and facilities on the land.

We are not coming cap in hand, we are saying we require the return of our land in the manner which we will determine. We hold the government responsible for the destruction of the structures which were on our land," Mr Horatius Mabaso, of the Alcockspruit community told the Advisory Commission on Land Claims (ACLA).

On February 24 1993, the Alcockspruit community presented their land claim to the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA) at a public hearing in Newcastle.

It seems most likely that the community's land will be returned to them. The state still owns the land being claimed and there was no opposition to the community's claim from the Natal Provincial Administration's Community Services branch and the local farmers' association. We trust that ACLA will soon be making its recommendation to the state president and that a favourable decision about the land will be made public soon.

In addition to its claim that the three farms which comprise Alcockspruit be returned to them, the community also asked

ACLA to get the government to buy up two farms adjacent to Alcockspruit so that evicted labour tenants from neighbouring farms could have access to grazing and agricultural land. This is the first time that a former freehold community has called for land to be made available to tenants as part of the community's land claim. The two farms in question are Koppie Alleen and Jubilee. The community also called on the farmer who had evicted the tenants to contribute to the purchase of these farms.

Mr Horatius Mabaso, chairperson of the Alcockspruit committee and a descendent of one of the



Mr Horatius Mabaso.

original purchasers of Alcockspruit, told ACLA that the community regarded this call as reasonable. He said that some of the evicted tenants had lived on the land for as long as 32 years. "But this farmer evicted them and is trying to settle them on land we are claiming," Mr Mabaso said.

"We know the suffering of the landless and we won't chase them away when we return to our land. We know how black people have suffered but we don't exonerate the farmers and the government from their responsibility. We can provide a residential area, but these people need grazing land and land for cultivation," he said.

ACLA has invited the Alcockspruit to submit a written report about their request that the government buy Jubilee and Koppie Alleen for the evicted tenants.

The community said they also wanted to see their land restored to the state it had been in before their removal. "We are not coming cap in hand, we are saying we require the return of our land in the manner which we will determine.

"We hold the government responsible for the destruction of the structures which were on our land (halls, dipping tanks, the church and others). We also

want our title deeds to be returned. We will be submitting a development plan to ACLA but we hope this will not hold up the return of people to our land. People want to return as soon as the residential area is



Mrs Suthu Campbell.

restored. Other development structures can be built when the people are in place. We trust our land will be returned, injustice will be undone and God's will be done," said Mr Mabaso.

Mrs Suthu Campbell told ACLA that she had also been



Miss Sheila Kunene.

born at Alcockspruit. "Our forced removal from Alcockspruit was very painful, the kind of pain which is difficult to explain," she said. Since the removal, she had not had a house of her own. She only got a house of her own two weeks ago, she said. She said that Alcockspruit before the community's removal had been a place of peace and educated people.

Miss Sheila Kunene was in Std 4 when the removal occurred. She told ACLA

that her schooling and that of her brothers and sisters was disrupted because of the forced removal. "Our father had just died and our mother could not afford the school fees in the new area. My mother had to struggle for our survival. Soon after we were moved to Madadeni, my brother was stabbed to death. The forced removal affected our family very deeply," she said.

Mr Amos Bhengu, grandson of one of the original owners of Alcockspruit and son of one of the men who helped to build the Alcockspruit church, said the repeal of the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts had created hope in the community. "Since the apartheid land laws have been removed, their effects must also be removed," he said.

Mr Phillips of the Newcastle Farmers' Association said the Association had no problem with the Alcockspruit community returning to their land.

Mr Neil Fox of the NPA's Community Services branch said the NPA would be happy to provide support to the community if they had their land returned. "Natal has experienced tremendous violence over the years and if people can get the opportunity to return to their farms this will give them the chance to escape from this violence. People have been clear in expressing their aspirations and desires to go back to the land and if granted permission to return these aspirations could be realised," he said.

About 200 members of the Alcockspruit community attended the hearing.