

The people shall share - but not our properties

BACK to Canaan. This was the message of the Mandlazini

community on Sunday, February 14 1993 in their attempted reoccupation of the fertile land in central Richards Bay from which they were removed in 1976. More than 500 members of the community came from as far away as Ntambanana, 60km from Richards Bay on Natal's north coast, to take part in the planned march and reoccupation, the first by a dispossessed community in Natal since 1991. Although the community was stopped from carrying out plans to reoccupy the land indefinitely by an urgent interim interdict obtained by the Richard's Bay Municipality, their spirits were high as they started the long dusty walk to the chosen site - the place where their church had once stood. Singing softly to the mournful whisper of a two metre long home-made horn and jollier bursts from a bugle, old and young trod the path of a time of plenty in the searing heat. The very old travelled in cars and kombis. One old man, cycled slowly at the side of the crowd.

At the chosen site, older members of the community recalled the days of milk and honey before their removal at gunpoint. They spoke of the gum and fruit trees they had lost, their



Some of the marchers on their way to the site where the community church once stood.

crops and houses and how they were able to make money from fishing. They compared their lost Canaan to the dry wasteland of Ntambanana where they were forced to live. "It was unfit for human habitation. There was no healthy water, no employment, no plantations conducive to vegetables and fruit trees. Because of its climate and conditions, cattle farming land in Ntambanana was too small to accommodate us," said Mr Jotham Zithulele Sokhulu, secretary of the Mandlazini Interim Committee.

Speaker after speaker spoke of the people's hurt and bitterness over the loss of their land. They had not been compensated for their loss. Promises of employment in Richards Bay, when factories opened, did not materialise, they said. And the properties

from which they had been forced off at gunpoint were now prime industrial and residential areas in Richards Bay.

At the end of the service, the community handed over a memorandum for the mayor of Richards Bay, detailing their grievances and demanding the return of all remaining industrial and residential land. The Mandlazini Interim Committee is hoping to enter into negotiations around the return of the land with all relevant parties, including the National Peace Accord.

The community's protest was monitored by observers from the United Nations, European Economic Community, Organisation of African Unity and the local Dispute Resolution Committee. A large contingent of security forces was also present.

to page 4