

Natal communities demand back title deeds

"WE demand that the present government heals the wounds of the past." This was the message from representatives of seven black freehold communities in Natal at their meeting with the Department of Regional and Land Affairs on July 7 1993.

At the meeting community representatives from Charlestown, Cornfields, Matiwane's Kop, Roosboom, Steincoalspruit, Stoffelton and Tembalihle handed over a memorandum to Department of Regional and Land Affairs representative, Johan van Dam.

In their memorandum the communities demanded:

- immediate and speedy return of title deeds to all rightful owners and heirs
- restoration of mineral rights to rightful landowners
- full compensation to landowners where mineral rights have been ceded in the past
- full compensation for landowners where land has been sold or leased and benefits made from this. The communities reiterated their total rejection of the government's demand that land claimants of the communities should repay compensation they may have received at the time of their removal
- that landowners be restored to their previous position by compensating



Cornfields, one of the communities campaigning to get back their title deeds.

them for the pain and suffering, economic underdevelopment and impoverishment caused by the forced removals process

- that communities' infrastructures that were demolished because of the government's apartheid and unjust deeds should be restored

Regarding new legislation around title deeds which was passed in parliament in June, the representatives said they were disappointed that they had not been consulted. Given the government's past promises around the return of title deeds and the lack of progress around their return, the representatives said they were sceptical that the new law would change anything in practice. In addition, they said, the government's demand for return of compensation before title deeds were restored would further delay the process.

The representatives told Mr van Dam that in June and

October 1990 memoranda were submitted to the government about the return of land and title to that land for the communities of Matiwane's Kop, Cornfields and Tembalihle. Although the communities were relieved from forced removal, their title deeds were not restored.

In May 1991 the issue was again raised in a memorandum with the now defunct Department of Development Aid (DDA). At the meeting with the DDA, the Department promised to take forward a process of restoring title deeds and various options for doing so were discussed with communities. However, nothing happened after the meeting and in March 1992 the Department of Regional and Land Affairs took over the functions of the DDA.

The DDA promised that communities would have their title deeds restored by December 1992. To date, this has never happened.