

Piet Retief petition signatures near 5000 as residents plead for Mpumalanga premier's intervention



Mpumalanga Premier Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane. Picture: Mpumalanga Provincial Government

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Piet Retief - The petition by concerned residents of Mkhondo (Piet Retief) local municipality has garnered almost 5000 signatures ahead of its expected delivery to the Premier of Mpumalanga, Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane.

The petition was started early this month when the challenges faced by the struggling municipality near the South Africa-Eswatini border came to a boiling point. Some residents complained about frequent power cuts, which are not the results of Eskom's load-shedding, uncollected litter and collapsing roads and sewer infrastructure.

The township of Thandukukhanya, the biggest and the most populated in Piet Retief, regularly faces power and water cuts. Violent crime, alcohol and drug abuse are becoming common features.

The residents first marched to the municipal offices in central Piet Retief to demand answers from mayor Mthokozisi Simelane and his fellow councillors.

Their protest coincided with anger which was sparked by allegations that Simelane, fellow councillors and staff members were on a junket worth R700 000 to Durban at the time of the Durban July, a charge Simelane denied.

After that protest, the residents then changed tact by pleading with Mtsweni-Tsipane, the MEC for co-operative governance and traditional affairs (Cogta) Mandla Ndlovu, and Gert Sibande district mayor Walter Mngomezulu to come and hear their concerns.

On Wednesday, Roqaiyah Omar, an activist from Mkhondo who has been at the forefront of the petition to Mtsweni-Tsipane, told IOL their actions were not politically motivated; hence they had not called for the resignation of the mayor, but they demanded that services due to citizens be rendered accordingly. She said as soon as they had gathered enough signatures for the petition, the results will be sent to Mtsweni-Tsipane.

“At the moment we are kind of sitting on plus minus 4 700 (signatures), we are hoping that after we tally up everything that we have had exceeded the amount of 5 000. Thereafter we are going to be sending invites to the MEC of Cogta, the district mayor and the premier.

“We are hoping to use the petition as an attachment to prove that this is not something that is only affecting a few people - it is affecting everyone in the town, it is affecting the whole community. Basically, we are hoping that this will show the urgency of the situation, so to get them to Piet Retief to address all the issues that are going,” Omar said.

sihle.mavuso@inl.co.za