

Religious leaders shocked at lack of toilets in settlement

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INLSA APPALLED: Religious leaders, from left, head of the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum Father John Oliver, Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba and Imam Rashied Omar, of the Claremont Main Road Mosque, were appalled at the conditions they found in this informal settlement in Khayelitsha. Picture: Jeffrey Abrahams

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Staff Reporter

SANITATION, clean water, drainage, refuse management and safety are the biggest challenges facing residents of RR Section and the Taiwan informal settlement in Khayelitsha, according to members of the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum and the Social Justice Coalition (SJC).

Yesterday members of both organisations were led on a walkabout in the areas by Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, who declared that the religious leaders were there to “show solidarity with the poorest of the poor”.

SJC co-ordinator Gavin Silber said there were about 3 000 households of about five people each in RR Section who had to share about 280 toilets.

The toilets were not properly serviced, which led to many residents preferring to relieve themselves in buckets or in the nearby wetland.

Resident Nelisa Macholi, 49, said her family was one of those who used buckets.

She said some of the clean toilets, which were meant to be shared, were locked by people who kept them for their personal use.

When the bucket in her home was full, the family dug a hole in the ground and buried the contents.

Nkululeko Mgubo, 23, said that when the toilets were blocked, he and other residents walked across Lansdowne Road to relieve themselves.

It was unsafe for them to do so at night, but they had no choice.

Catholic priest Father Peter-John Pearson said the conditions they had witnessed during the walk were appalling.

“Nobody should have to live in these conditions.

“As faith leaders we need to step up our advocacy.

“We have to conscientise people to the issues.”

Pearson said that the overarching issue was the “inequality in our society”.

But he added that it was encouraging to see, “in the midst of such communities, mothers and fathers raising families with integrity and dignity”.

“We need to honour that by providing dignified and just living conditions,” he said.

Imam Rashied Omar, of the Claremont Main Road Mosque, said visiting the area had been an eye-opener which would inspire him to work harder at identifying with the marginalised people in the province.

“Our city is divided. This gave us a chance to connect with the people who are suffering.

“Hopefully, together we can work to change things.”

The walk ended at a church in Taiwan where the priests said a prayer for the residents.

Makgoba said church leaders had to act by asking the government and the private sector to help, but also to mobilise people.

Silber said they wanted the city to implement a maintenance plan for the toilets in the area.

“But the city would need help in this regard,” and the church had an important role to play in the consultations between residents and city officials.

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<http://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/religious-leaders-shocked-at-lack-of-toilets-in-settlement-1.1092094#.VCE9Chacxfg>