

ILSE FREDERICKS

## Zanzibaris recall day the 'big trucks came'

SALIM Rapentha and his family were forcibly removed from Durban's Bluff in the 1960s and relocated to Chatsworth in terms of the Group Areas Act.

Last weekend, the 80-year-old grandfather was overjoyed when 191 families of the Zanzibari community were handed title deeds to a 43ha plot of land on the Bluff by the Land Claims Commission.

Rapentha, who has been living in Bayview, Chatsworth, said he cried "tears of joy" during the handing-over ceremony.

The Zanzibari community's ancestors came to South Africa as slaves from the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar in 1874.

Rapentha vividly remembers the day "the big trucks came" and moved them to Chatsworth.

"It was heartbreaking. I had worked at a factory and I bought my mother a house and good furniture. And then the trucks came. They just threw everything on and it all got ruined.

"And when we arrived in Chatsworth, we realised there were not enough houses for everyone," said Rapentha.

Dawood Nassir, 57, was 19 when his family were relocated to Bayview.

"A group of white people came here one day and told us we had to leave. We could do nothing but agree," he said.

Zainub Canthitoo, 73, also recalled how her family were told to leave their house.

"Everybody was crying. We had to leave our lovely



**BACK HOME:** Abey Canthitoo and Dawood Nassir on vacant land on the Bluff which was handed back to the Zanzibari community  
Picture: JACKIE CLAUSEN

homes. Everything we knew was there, our graveyard and our mosque. And we didn't know where we were going to."

Her parents were not allocated a house in Chatsworth because they were classified as coloured.

"Many families were separated because some people were classified as coloured and had to go stay in Wentworth, while others were classified as Indian and went to stay in Bayview. In Bluff there was unity. All people, coloured, African and Indian, lived together and there was no separation."

Canthitoo said she was

overcome with emotion during last weekend's ceremony.

Abey Canthitoo, the Zanzibari Civic Association's public relations officer who lodged the claim with the Land Claims Commission, said the community were looking forward to using the land to their benefit.

"We decided to lodge the claim in 1989, so it has been a very long fight. We all felt great when we finally received the land. Now our focus is on using the land to help the community. Plans are being drawn up and we are hoping to build houses and mi-

cro-businesses," he said.

Zwelihle Memela, a spokesperson for the KwaZulu-Natal Land Claims Commission, said the commission was delighted to hand back the land to the community.

"The Zanzibari community is arguably the smallest minority group in the province, and they were dispossessed of their land under the Group Areas Act. It was our test to address this imbalance, and we want to thank the community for their patience and for settling the claim administratively and not letting it go to court," he said.

# The Zanzibari Time Line

The Zanzibari community has been part of South Africa since 1873; having being rescued from the Arabs in the Red Sea the "Lost Tribe" was sent to Natal where many still reside today

133 years later we are Proudly South Africans enjoying the freedom, acceptance and empowerment as part of the rainbow nation

However our road to freedom has never been an easy one.

Our forebears suffered through the ages of slavery, World Wars, apartheid, forced removals, discrimination, racism and poverty.

As we go through the years we acknowledge the years that defined us, the people who betrayed us and the heroes of our society who acted out of courage passion and faith, in order to preserve our cultural heritage our language our religion our indigenous cultures and rituals our way of life that has been past on from generation to generation that is still alive today and will ensure that we will never again be a lost tribe

1870

Children aged between 11-18 were captured from Mozambique, Nampula, Nakhalia, Liah and all along the coast of East Africa by Arabs to serve as slaves in Saudi Arabia

1873

The British abolished slavery on 5 July

The ship carrying our forebears was intercepted in the red sea by the British and re-routed to Zanzibar

Due to the uprisings of the Zulu's the British councilor of Zanzibar John Kirk ordered the "Lost Tribe" to be sent to Port Natal to address the labour shortage

On 4 August a total of 113 of our forebears arrived in Port Natal aboard the H.M.S. Briton

1874

On 24 March.81 members arrived on Port Natal aboard the H.M.S Kaffir between 1875 and 1877 the amount of Zanzibaris in Port Natal totaled 500 of which 432 were employed.

1880

The entry of forebears stopped.

The government had released labour that had served three year indentured period. Granted free-pass on the Bluff land owned by businessman Benningfield which gave our forebears an opportunity to settle and develop. The community was involved in gardening, fishing; raising poultry many worked at the Durban Harbour and railways others worked for petroleum Companies like Shell, Bp as well as civil work labourers in the construction. They also engaged in cultural and religious activities which attracted more Muslims and created a sense of belonging. This period characterized with happiness, growth and community Building.

1886

The Roman Catholic Church bought land on King Rest.

1889

Muslim Merchants bought and occupied land from Ruben Burningfield Under the pretence that they are representing the community as non whites could not purchase land due to the by-laws. They then established the Mohamedan Church was created as a Trust to own forebears Land. The Trust consisted of no Zanzibaris.

1916

The mohamedan Church Trust was renamed Juma Masjid Trust on 18 April.

1923

The Juma Masjid Trust registered on 7 March at the Registrar of Deeds. Juma Masjid made their presence felt and attempted to oppress and Control community.

1947

Increased pressure and control from Juma Masjid and other social problems leads ton the formation of a community organization Rahmania Madressa Society under Chairman Mr. T. Salim.

1952

Juma Masjid Trust sent condition of occupation letter to the community which imposed further control and handling of the community which stifled growth and development of the community.

1954

Juma Masjid Trust negotiated with Government to sell land King Rest.

1955

At a small congregation at the Grey Street Masjid on Tuesday, 27 September Jumà Masjid passed the resolution to sell the Land.

1956

Juma Masjid Trust sold its parcel of the Land to the government without informing the community.

1957

The groups Area Act was passed which separated communities across racial lines.

1958

The Group Areas Act declared Kings Rest a 'White Area'. The Juma Masjid Trust still retained ownership of the Mosque and cemetery as there were no buyers interested in the monuments.

1961

Zanzibari Arabs were classified as Indians on 3 February by Minister of Interior published in Gazette No.6220  
Application for identity cards as they couldn't obtain a job without them.

1962

The forced removals commenced in King Rest. Depending on ones classification under the population Registration act the community was relocated to Chatsworth, Wentworth and other areas.

The removals were painful. No compensation was paid for houses crops, trees and livestock and poultry owned by the Zanzibaris.

The first seven years many families lost their homes due to non payment for services.

1970

Years characterized with increased deaths, great hardship, harsh discrimination and non acceptance from the Chatsworth community.

1972

The last family was removed from King Rest.

1989

In order to address the issues of the community and improve the quality of life the Zanzibar Civil Association was formed by the Rahmania Masjid society and the broader the community.

1990

The Zanzibari community sends a representative to the National Government for the restoration of Kings Rest Land and pursued Juma Masjid to discuss admin Issues. Apartheid was abolished.

1992

The Zanzibari Community successfully appealed against S.A.S.O.U.D to develop sub 15 in King Rest.

1994

Mr. Mandela is elected president of South Africa.

2003

On 28 June a portion of the land rights for Kings Rest was restored to the community.

2004

18 September the Zanzibaris celebrated the handover of King Rest.  
South Africa celebrates ten years of democracy.

2005

The Zanzibari Development Trust struggle to develop land hindered by-laws and  
bureaucracy.

2006

The first celebration commemorating the arrival of the Zanzibaris to South Africa 133  
years ago held on 4 August in Chatsworth.