

## Thuli gives 'pilgrims' a lifeline

Business owners will rely on the public protector's scathing report on the Mpumalanga municipality of Pilgrim's Rest to back their claims that they were wrongfully served eviction notices in June 2012 to make way for people who were illegally given shop leases.



Shopowners who were illegally evicted by the Department of Public Works have some certainty following findings that the department acted illegally. Image: [Pilgrims Rest](#)

Lawyers for the business owners, responding to the findings from Thuli Madonsela's released last month said that her report is wonderful and it is likely to form the basis of our action to rescind the eviction notices.

Attorney Pieter Steenkamp said on Monday (6 January): "We are waiting for the final legal opinion from our senior counsel on this new approach."

In July 2012, the Pretoria High Court granted an interim interdict stopping the evictions pending the main court application. But Steenkamp said the legal team had been unable to proceed as the provincial public works department did not hand over as per the court order, all the relevant tender documents.

Madonsela has found that the tender process was "characterised by gross irregularities and maladministration" and recommended that the new shop leases be cancelled.

The business owners' legal action has been dragging on for more than a year.

Six businesses are said to have closed shop, with Pilgrims Place, an antique shop, becoming the latest casualty three months ago after it had operated in the town for more than four decades.

Poniekrantz Arts and Craft shop owner Sharon Paterson said she saw no point in paying R9,000 to market her business at the town at this year's Tourism Indaba in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, as she did not know if she will still be running the store next year.

The provincial department of public works, which owns the buildings in the town, has yet to respond to Madonsela's findings.

Spokesman Dumisani Malamule said the department was studying the report.

Source: The Times via I-Net Bridge