

March to protest farm evictions

ABOUT 200 rural tenants from farms in the Colenso District marched to the local police station in August to protest evictions. This was the first time rural tenants in Natal took to the streets to highlight their plight. The tenants have occupied land, now owned by white farmers, for many generations. In their memorandum, handed to the Colenso Police Station Commander, they demanded that:

- the government stop farm evictions
- the government speak to white farmers about tenants being allowed the right to remain on the farms and continue using the land
- the police stop helping farmers with evictions.

People who took part in the march came from several farms in the District, among them, Gannahoek, Rietbult and Cromley Bank.

AFRA asked Mr Mbabayi Mtshali, one of the people who took part in the march, to tell us about the march and what has happened since.

"The idea of the march arose because of the increase in evictions in the Colenso area," said Mr Mtshali. "These evictions affected many people. We held a meeting to discuss the idea of holding a march.



Colenso tenants hand their memorandum to the police,

People at the meeting supported the idea of a march. After that we went to the Colenso SAP to ask for permission. The station commander asked us why we wanted to march. He asked us to tell him our reasons in writing and to write the letter in English and Afrikaans. We were assisted in writing this letter by a teller at the Colenso tearoom.

"The station commander agreed to the march and gave us directions to follow during the march.

"After we got permission to have the march, we drew up a memorandum. The station commander told us to write down all our grievances and to find someone who could put these in English. A local shopkeeper helped us to do this and to get the memorandum typed up. Four people were mandated by the meeting to see the shopkeeper. The demands which went into the memorandum were decided at the meeting and this was

done democratically.

"Since the march, nobody has reported receiving eviction notices. It is very quiet on the farms at the moment. But I can't say that the march achieved what we wanted it to achieve because the government has still not responded to our demand for an end to evictions. And we do not know what their response will be.

"One of the effects of the march is that people are getting organised. We have received messages from as far as Weenen that other tenants want to join us if we march for the second time.

"We have not planned any follow up activities. We are waiting for a response from the government. We go to the SAP offices to see if there has been a response. The government has the power to stop evictions by an act of parliament.

"Only a democratically elected government can do this."