

Cops fire rubber bullets at Grabouw protesters

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(Nielen de Klerk, News24)

Grabouw - Police fired rubber bullets and used teargas to disperse more than 1 000 people protesting over service delivery at the Grabouw municipal offices in the Western Cape on Monday.

The rubber bullets were fired when protesters marching in Ou Kaapse Weg started throwing stones at police.

Earlier in the day, a section of the N2 passing the town had to be closed for several hours after cars were stoned.

Oil was poured on the highway and later rocks and burning tyres were used to block access to the town.

The N2 was closed at Sir Lowry's Pass, Gordon's Bay and close to Bot River.

The protesters gathered in Gaffley Street and marched to the municipal offices in Pineview to hand over a memorandum listing their grievances.

The public order policing unit was called in with Nyalas and water cannons to contain the crowd.

Theewaterskloof Mayor Chris Punt arrived from Caledon to receive the memorandum.

After handing over the memorandum and being addressed by several community leaders, the crowd left the municipal offices. They started marching back to the townships and throwing stones.

The protest is the second in recent weeks. Residents were not satisfied with the response to a list of grievances handed over to deputy mayor Mlulami Tshaka and town manager Anton Liebenberg on 20 August.

John Michels, leader of the Grabouw Civics Organisation, then warned that the N2 would be blocked every weekend until their demands were met.

Grievances included in the memorandum were lack of housing, poor and expensive electricity supply and bad road conditions.

Margaret le Roux, secretary of the GCO, said some people had been waiting more than 20 years for their houses.

"We are also not satisfied with the way the houses are allocated," she said.

"We have a list of people that need houses but the municipality has a different list to ours."

Eskom's 'responsibility'

The Theewaterskloof municipality said in a statement that it did not provide electricity to Grabouw.

Eskom was responsible for the provision of electricity.

"We do have a road maintenance programme to keep roads in a proper state but we will look at the conditions of the specific roads mentioned in the memorandum of grievances," it said.

"As far as the roads are concerned, the statement says the municipality receives a very limited budget from the national housing department of which the bulk is spent on housing for Grabouw."

The ANC in the Western Cape and the SA Communist Party have pledged support for the protesters.

Andile Lili, expelled former Cape Town councillor and leader of the Ses'Khona Peoples Movement, said they were gaining more and more support in Grabouw and the Theewaterskloof area.

He was not at the scene in Grabouw but confirmed by telephone that members of his movement were involved in organising the march.

"We fully support our members and the Grabouw Civic Organisation and will encourage them to continue taking action until their demands are met.

"The people must stand up for themselves."

Ses'Khona, which has a strong base in Cape Town, was aiming at extending its support base to the Western Cape rural areas including Theewaterskloof, Hermanus and De Doorns, Lili said.

- SAPA