‘Homes should not be prisons’

August 18 2011
By Andre Grobler (SAPA)

Brandfort - African National Congress stalwart Winnie Madikizela-Mandela will lead a government task team to advise on the eradication of informal settlements, Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale said on Thursday.

Sexwale said the formal announcement and the team that would help her would be made known next week.

Madikizela-Mandela and Sexwale visited a women’s building project in Brandfort in the Free State as part of Women’s Month.

It was expected the team would look at all aspects of housing development, including sanitation.

“She will help us develop informal settlements because we cannot solve it without the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela motherly heart,” Sexwale told hundreds of people gathered in Brandfort.

Earlier, he said the country had 2 450 informal settlements and only a woman with a “motherly heart” could help change “prisons” into homes.

“Many houses are still prisons,” he said.

Madikizela-Mandela was kept under house arrest by the apartheid government in Brandfort in the late 1970s.

The provincial government intended turning that house into a museum.

Before addressing the gathering, Sexwale, Madikizela-Mandela and Free State Premier Ace Magashule were driven around in the township from building site to building site, where they helped and talked to the new house owners.

Dressed in blue overalls and purple hard hats, the minister and premier led a government delegation through the Majwemasweu settlement and even tried painting an outside wall.

The government was building 100 houses in Brandfort, of which women were helping to build 55.

Magashule handed title deeds to various women on whose land a new house was being erected.

Sexwale said Madikizela-Mandela’s presence in Brandfort would give people hope that “someday you will be out of a shack”.

The minister said one of those that received her own house was a 102-year-old woman.

“What a shame to be 102 years old and not have a house,” he told the crowd later.

At one of the building sites visited, Selina Motsatsa, 55, was excited to see Sexwale and Madikizela-Mandela visiting a homeowner across the street.

“So bly, dit voel lekker (So glad, it feels nice).”

Two other women with her, Lidia Jackson, 53, and Amelia Moholo, 56, were also in high spirits.

“Brandfort is now big with Madikizela-Mandela. Here the houses are beautiful,” said a smiling Moholo.

All three women had a young child on their backs under a blanket, with one of their grandchildren sitting at their feet.

“Everybody is glad,” said Jackson, waving at the small crowd of officials squeezed into the yard across the road.

The women’s building project was an annual initiative to commemorate the 1956 women's march to the Union Building against apartheid pass laws. - Sapa