



# Lives of nurses in danger

CLIVE NDOU

THE Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa has warned the union could be forced to withdraw its members from certain areas in KwaZulu-Natal should violence directed at health workers in the province continue.

The union's threat follows a spate of violent incidents at the province's hospitals with the latest being last week's hijacking and robbery of three nurses from the Ngwelezani Hospital in Empangeni.

"Thugs are targeting the department's minibuses and 4x4s. In the past two months, more than 11 vehicles have been hijacked and no less than 18 vehicles lost to similar acts this year alone," the union's provincial secretary, Cassim Lekhoathi, said. The nurses were travelling in a minibus belonging to the state when they were confronted by three armed men.

The hijackers demanded their cellphones, wallets and bank cards before driving them into the bush where one of the nurses was almost raped.

Last week's hijacking of health workers was the 18th since April.

"We therefore demand that the

employer provide a safe working environment for our members with immediate effect.

"Failure to do so by August 31, means we would be left with no option but to withdraw our members from all these red-flagged facilities," Lekhoathi said.

Health MEC Sibongiseni Dhlomo, said the incident had left the nurses traumatised.

"The safety of health workers comes first. On learning of this horrific act I rushed to uThungulu district, toying with the idea of closing down all outreach programmes.

He said a total of 18 of the department's vehicles had been hijacked in the area since April this year.

"Our health professionals are really concerned and afraid and if we stop going to that area, our people are going to start dying," Dhlomo said.

The hijacked vehicle, Dhlomo said, was meant to help nurses to reach patients who were not able to visit the hospital.

Nurses working in the department's outreach programme in the area, Dhlomo said, would now be escorted by the police.

*provinces@thenewage.co.za*