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Omar focuses on forced removals

By SHAUN HARRIS

DURBAN photographer Omar Badsha is earning a growing reputation as a man who uses his camera to probe and expose communities who live under apartheid's squalid conditions, often tucked away in remote corners far from the public eye.

His work has been exhibited around South Africa and forms part of the Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty in Southern Africa.

A collection of his telling black and white photographs will soon be on sale under the title Imijondolo, the Zulu word for the makeshift houses thousands of "squatters" live in around Durban.

With text by University of Natal lecturer Heather Hughes and a foreword by Bishop Desmond Tutu, Omar's photographic essay focuses on people who are victims of and live under the threat of forced removals in Inanda, the sprawling district on the outskirts of Durban.

Resistance

"Inanda can be taken as a model for several other communities living under similar conditions in the greater Durban area, and for what millions of people are going through in this country," Omar said.

Omar turned his lens on Inanda because he has known and worked with the people there for many years.

"In 1981 people began to get eviction notices telling them they were squatters and would have to leave. That was when several people who until then had been working independantly in the area banded together to work out what could be done to stop the removals."

Omar was one of the people who formed the Inanda Support Committee in 1983 to organise resistance to the removals.

Working with the threatened community they managed to get the question of removals in Inanda raised in Parliament and extracted promises on the people's future from various officials.

"But the situation in Inanda has not changed much — in some ways it is even worse.

"What I wanted to do in my book was not present the community as victims, like many social documentaries have done, but rather to show their dignity and spirit of resistance.

"One of the things the threat of removal has done is to unite the people of Inanda — I want to present these people through my lens as they are seen by their own community."

Imijondolo — published by Afrapix, a photographer's collective of which Omar is a founder member — is being distributed locally and internationally by Ravan Press, and should cost about R15,50 in Durban bookshops.

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