

Metro cops 'punched' mealie vendors

SIHLE MLAMBO

DURBAN'S informal mealie vendors are preparing for a showdown with city authorities after they were allegedly beaten by metro police officers who confiscated their corn for operating without permits.

Ten vendors have laid charges of assault, claiming they were kicked and punched by police during a raid in the city centre this week. They also said police used pepper spray on them.

Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi is expected to address the vendors at a meeting in Durban tomorrow.

Mzwandile Mavula of the African Co-operative for Hawkers and Informal Business said yesterday that they needed the help of the unions because of metro police brutality.

Mavula claimed that no action had been taken against police officers when complaints were previously lodged against them.



'ASSAULT': A street mealie vendor explains how metro police beat them up this week.

PICTURE: SANDILE MAKHOBA

In one incident near Albert Park last year, police had confiscated goods from hawkers and were seen sharing it among themselves, he said. The matter had been reported, but nothing had been done, he said.

On Tuesday, vendors said

they did not know why they were assaulted by police, who confiscated trolleys full of mealies. The women claimed the officers were instructed by a uniformed man in an eThek-wini metro police van to clean up the area.

Mealie vendors who operate from Ismail C Meer (Lorne) Street have opened a case of assault against the police and have obtained medical reports about their injuries from Addington Hospital.

Durban Central SAPS spokesman Captain Khephu Ndlovu confirmed that a case of assault with intention to do grievous bodily harm had been opened by 10 people. No arrests had been made and investigations were continuing.

The acting metro police spokesman, Superintendent Sibonelo Mchunu, said the hawkers should report their complaint of assault to them and it would be dealt with internally.

He said the mealie vendors required permits from the municipality's business support unit to operate in the city or face prosecution.

Mavula said complaints about the business support unit had been submitted to Public Protector Thuli Madonsela.

sihle.mlambo@inl.co.za