Thornhill is a black community of 10,000 people in the Eastern Cape near the white town of Queenstown.

It is a victim of broken promises and a complicated shell game played by the South African government as part of its forced removals policy which has resulted in the forced movement of 3 1/2 million black South Africans over the past 30 years.

In 1976, most of the people currently living in Thornhill were living in the nearby "homeland" of Transkei which was about to become independent. They were given the choice of staying in the Transkei, thus losing their South African citizenship and their right to work in South Africa -- or relocating to Thornhill where they would still be South African citizens.

Those who decided to move to Thornhill were lured by promises that they would be given plentiful and fertile farm land. They were taken on bus tours by government authorities and shown some of the best land in the area. But once they moved, they found they had been tricked. Thornhill residents now have virtually no access to land. In addition, Thornhill was itself later incorporated into the homeland of the Ciskei, which became "independent" in 1981. Residents of Thornhill thus lost their South African citizenship anyway. They now have no rights to work in South Africa. They have in effect become aliens in their own country. They have also been forced to submit to the authority of an oppressive tribal chief who is an agent of the "homeland" government. Their situation is so bleak that, as the National Committee Against Removals describes it, they "live on hope and little else."

Thornhill has recently begun fighting to force the government to fulfill its promises. As a result, they have suffered extreme harassment at the hands of the Ciskei authorities. Community leaders have been jailed and tortured. They have been denied access to land and jobs in Ciskei, rendering many in the community jobless and poverty-stricken. Their traditional rural way of life has been almost completely destroyed. The South African government has washed its hand of the community, saying Thornhill is not its responsibility but that of the Ciskeian "government."
By establishing a sister-community linkage with Thornhill, Chicago can help the community put pressure on the South African government to meet its three central demands:

1. That land promised to them when they were moved to Thornhill in 1976 be granted to them.
2. That South African citizenship be restored to Thornhill residents, and that they be given the right to work in South Africa proper.
3. That they be allowed to elect their own leadership, rather than being subjected to an oppressive tribal leadership.

Chicago can help Thornhill in its struggle to survive as a viable community, and also put a spotlight on the bankruptcy of South Africa's "homelands" policy.

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If you would like to help, or would like further information, please call:

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