

ANCYL warns of Zim-style land invasions in South Africa

NICKOLAUS BAUER
The Mail and Guardian
06 JUN 2012

Farm invasions are "inevitable" should white South Africans not voluntarily hand over land to the government, says the ANC Youth League.

"If they don't want to see angry black youths flooding their farms they must come to the party. Whites must volunteer some of the land and mines they own. They can't only be compelled to do so through legislation," deputy youth league president Ronald Lamola said on Tuesday, calling for changes to the Constitution to allow the state to appropriate land. Lamola was speaking at the end of a youth league policy workshop held in preparation for the ANC policy conference later this month.

He drew comparisons with Zimbabwe, referring to the occupation of land there at the turn of the century, when predominantly white-owned farms were forcibly taken by ruling party-backed militias. The largely ungoverned process descended into violence and saw farm owners aggressively removed from their land.

While the league is not explicitly calling for the occupation of privately owned land, Lamola said if changes to the current state of land reform were not made soon, it would be out of the league's hands if property were to be forcibly taken.

Society is angry

"It looks like it's becoming inevitable. Society is angry. If it happens, it will be their [white South Africans] fault. They are not coming to the party," he said.

As part of its calls to change government's approach to land reform, the league is calling on wholesale changes to the sections of the Constitution governing land reform. "We must be unapologetic about this. We need to change sections of the Constitution to bring about the change we need," Lamola said.

Lamola said current land owners should be involved in a skills transfer process so that emerging farmers are mentored by those surrendering land. He said this will be for the "greater good" of South Africa as their current status can't be "safely guaranteed".

"We are not talking about a partnership; the state must be the dominant player in terms of how land is used. But white South Africans must continue to participate, they remain relevant to this process and will continue to do so," Lamola added.

We want decisive leadership

With drastic land reform in mind, Lamola said the league would be seeking to elect leaders at the ANC's upcoming elective conference in December, who won't be "scared to implement unpopular policies". "We want decisive leadership, ones that will give us direction and think behind the tribes they come from and beyond their regions, who realise they lead a nation," he said.

However, Lamola said the league would only be announcing its preferred candidate once the leadership debate is formally opened by the ANC in October.

Section 25 of the Constitution says property may be expropriated subject to compensation as "agreed to by those affected or decided or approved by a court". The compensation should be "equitable, reflecting an equitable balance between the public interest and the interests of those affected".

Redistribution targets

The department of land reform and rural development says it is in the process of producing a green paper on land redistribution to tackle the matter of further land expropriation. There is, however, no indication yet about what the green paper will propose.

In his 2012 budget vote speech, Rural Development and Land Reform Minister Gugile Nkwinti indicated government had only achieved just over a quarter of its target to redistribute 30% of South Africa's agricultural land by 2014.

Nkwinti's department has also set up a joint task team with the department of public works to work on apparent distortions in prices that government pays for land. He said farmers are charging government above market value rates, and proposed the establishment of a land-valuer general to deal with the value of land.

As of yet, the ANC has not produced a document that will solely deal with land reform, but said one will be released at the upcoming policy conference.

'Deep trouble'

However, both ANC and government have agreed that the willing buyer, willing seller principle as enshrined in the Constitution has not worked.

Professor Ben Cousins, the chairperson of poverty, land and agrarian studies at the National Research Foundation, said the land reform process is in "deep trouble" in South Africa. "We had rather unrealistic ambitions in the early years of our democracy. Quick resolutions to these issues were never going to happen, so we have to be a bit more sensitive to the challenges we face when it comes to land reform," Cousins told the Mail & Guardian.

Cousins said there is no "quick fix" for the current issues surrounding land reform, be it a change to the Constitution or otherwise. "To see these matters resolved will take a lot of work. The government has to become a more effective player in the land reform process by buying, negotiating prices and managing the process," Cousins said.

Copyright 2012 Mail and Guardian