

'We were robbed of our land'

Thursday, January 4, 2007 - Web posted at 7:18:22 GMT

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THE Bondelswarts clan in the South, a branch of the Nama tribe who claim they were robbed of their ancestral land at Heriaxabes, measuring 180 000 hectares, now claim restoration of what was theirs.

Heriaxabes is located near Ariamsvlei, on the southeastern border with South Africa.

This was revealed at the Bondelswarts centennial festival held two weeks ago at Heriaxabes.

Speaking at the event, Josef Christiaans, a special adviser to the Bondelswarts Captain Anna Christiaans, claimed their forefathers were duped out of their land by a certain Charles Eduard William Wheeler.

He claimed that Wheeler, who then sold the land to the Roman Catholic Church, had conned the tribe's forefathers into the land deal over a debt of 550 pounds they allegedly owed him.

"What happened 100 years ago was daylight robbery.

Our forefathers were duped out of their land," said Christiaans.

"It is now our obligation as descendants of our passing heroes such as Captain Jan Abraham Christiaans and Willem Christiaans, to ensure that we (leave) no stone unturned to redress the travesty of injustice," Christiaans said.

However, Father Klaus Lettner, an administrator of the Roman Catholic Church in Karas, expressed anger and disgust over the claims by the Bondelswarts.

Lettner told The Namibian on Tuesday that Wheeler legally bought the land under the existing laws at that time.

"The Bondelswarts must stick to historical facts instead of getting emotional over a land deal that was done legally according to the existing laws at that time," Lettner said.

In a letter to the Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Windhoek on December 21, Hendrik Christian and Jacobus Josob demanded that the church give back the land.

"We the undersigned will be the curators overlooking the restoration of the above-named property to its rightful owners," they said.

"We further demand the you pay back the income the property had brought you since 1921 and a monthly lease since that time."

The pair said the moneys should be paid into a trust account of which the two men are trustees.

It is unclear whether the two men were writing to the RC Church in an official capacity on behalf of the Bondelswarts clan because they sent copies of their letter to the Bondelswarts Traditional Authority.

Lettner said the Roman Catholic Church only owns only 47 000 hectares of the 180 000 hectares of land in question.

He said the rest of the land is owned by commercial farmers.

Lettner said the two parties agreed to enter into a dialogue next month in an effort to resolve the land dispute.