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Give Land Reform a Chance, Urges Govt

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NEWS

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Windhoek

GOVERNMENT has called for patience on land reform, warning that the situation could degenerate into a revolution with undesired consequences if not handled correctly.

It follows a conference organised by the Namibia Farmworkers' Union (Nafwu) last weekend.

The theme of the conference was 'Give Back Our Land' and several speakers criticised the slow pace of land reform.

A statement issued by Lands Permanent Secretary Frans Tsheehama last week calls on Namibians to be cautious and not to be lured into unnecessary actions that may be tantamount to incitement or unguarded statements.

He said statements should not be made out of ignorance of facts or socio-political emotions, as they could be dangerous.

Lands Deputy Minister Isak Katali told the Nafwu conference that Government would not be able to reach its target of buying 15,3 million hectares of agricultural land by the year 2020 because of the sluggish pace.

So far only 1,3 million hectares of land (209 farms) have been acquired through the willing-seller, willing-buyer policy and expropriation at a cost of more than N\$215,4 million.

Tsheehama said the willing-seller, willing-buyer concept had its shortcomings and strengths, like the slow and cumbersome process, expensive land and the need for compulsory acquisition of land from those who are underutilising it.

"Many, if not all, farms that were identified are still to be heard in the High Court of the Republic of Namibia and the time it takes is long and frustrating.

No wonder many of our compatriots are getting impatient and fed up," the Permanent Secretary said.

He said Government is forced to dig deep into its pockets to make sure that formerly disadvantaged Namibians are adequately equipped to make a success with the land they get.

"While, to a certain extent, we are satisfied with the stakeholders' participation, not all stakeholders are doing their best to realise the great potential that is within our people," Tsheehama said.

He said many black farmworkers made commercial farmers rich but were failing to produce when resettled on their own land.

"Our people are perfectly capable if they are given resources and training," he said.

The Permanent Secretary said it was wrong to say that resettled people were dumped on farms where they cannot make a living.

"We know of many who have succeeded and are succeeding. After all, output depends on individuals; for those that are serious they can do it and the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement is there to make available the necessary resources when and as they are available (human and financial)," he said.

Resettlement programmes prior to Independence succeeded because of "colonialism and apartheid practices, when the largest piece of the cake was only for the white people and this is why there could be no reason for them not to succeed".

"Now, fortunately or unfortunately, the cake belongs to all of us and we have to distribute it reasonably and accordingly."

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