

## Land Issue Remains Burning Concern

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By Frederick Philander

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The government's land reform programme remains one of the burning issues for organized agriculture and the economic stability of the country.

This was said by the president of the Namibia Agriculture Union (NAU), Raimar von Hase, at the organization's 60th anniversary in the capital on Wednesday evening.

The occasion was attended by cabinet ministers, farmers and members of the diplomatic corps. Former Deputy Minister of Education, Clara Bohitile, was crowned best emerging farmer and received N\$7000 in prize money.

"Please, fellow farmers, if you are considering retiring, or if you have no successor, or have death or disease in the family and are thus unable to continue farming, or if you have multiple farms, or farmland that is un- or underused, please make this land available for the Land Reform Process," Raimar von Hase pleaded with the NAU members, predominantly white Namibian farmers.

According to him, with every farm made available under the government's willing buyer-willing seller initiative, the land transformation process will contribute towards the country's and agricultural stability.

"However, land acquisition for land reform requires the proverbial 'it takes two to tango', the other part being the government that must also ensure an atmosphere conducive to change of ownership. This atmosphere can be improved because resettlement thus far is experienced largely as a failure born out by the findings of many independent researches.

Furthermore nowadays waivers for Affirmative Action buyers seem difficult to obtain, an important tool and leg of land reform," Von Hase said of the process that is to resettle about 240000 previously disadvantaged Namibians.

"We are still saddled with the non-withdrawal clause, which simply makes any prospective seller hesitant to offer land to the government. The government's bureaucracy is also experienced as slow and cumbersome. The NAU has on many occasions made suggestions on how to speed up the process. Mention was made of incentives to induce farmers to sell their land to the government, but seem to have fallen on deaf ears," said the president who declared the NAU's preparedness to further engage in

dialogue with the government.

Von Hase recounted a 15%, about 1300 farms, change of farm ownership success rate achieved so far in Namibia, compared to South Africa's only 3,5% success rate.

"It is often heard that government intends resettling 240000 people through the land reform process. I have to place a serious question mark on the ability of our land to sustain from agricultural activities such a large number of people, especially when taking into consideration the fact that there are already about 130000 people living on and from freehold land. It is therefore important for the government to distinguish clearly between those who are primarily looking for a piece of land to gain security of tenure and those who are looking for a piece of land to farm so as to make a living," Von Hase advised.

The NAU president expressed a very positive outlook for the country's livestock production with commodities such as beef, lamb, goats and karakul presently experiencing the highest prices ever paid.

"The slogan: no farmer, no food, rings true. Unfortunately, this does not apply to the dairy and poultry farming sectors, which are battling to make ends meet. In particular, the dairy farmers are nearing total demise if government does not interfere quickly since cheap imports from South Africa and a slow Namibian bureaucracy are contributing to ruin this valuable farming sector permanently," he warned.

Dr Mohammed Karaan of Stellenbosch University, speaking on the role of agriculture in the national and regional economy, urged countries to change from bilateral to multilateral economic agreements whereby farmers can maximally benefit.

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