

South Unhappy With Land Reform

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Most farms in the Karas Region sold by white farmers to the government under the 'willing buyer-willing seller' scheme for resettlement purposes are prone to drought and inaccessible by road.

This is the view of Karas Regional Councillor, Paulus Ephraim, who yesterday spoke to New Era in an exclusive interview on the land issue in the south of the country.

"The white owners of the more economically productive farms are still refusing to sell and steadfastly cling to their farms, sometimes owning up to three. These are what we consider the selfish landowners who do not want to fully cooperate with the government. Why they refuse to sell their land, only they know, because in my view there is enough land in this country for everyone," Ephraim said.

He claimed that certain white farmers keep the government perpetually hostage with exceptionally high prices for their land.

"People in the Karas Region without land are increasingly growing impatient with this cat-and-mouse game of such farmers who are unreasonable and outright unwilling to sell their farms for the benefit of the previously disadvantaged people of the region," said Ephraim.

"This is indeed not a very good state of affairs for the economy and development of the country. On the one hand, there are resettled farmers who have made a success of farms purchased by the government. We are very proud of them. On the other hand, there are some of those new farmers who just do not care. Some just left their resettlement farms or re-rent the land to others," he said.

According to Ephraim, the region's people do not want to chase white farmers from the land.

"In fact, we are willing to share the land with them on an equal basis to make production possible for all, if we all can work and stay in harmony together. Unfortunately, some white farmers persist in their selfishness.

Furthermore, a big problem in the region is the fact that many farm owners are foreign absentee landlords who only come back to hunt and then leave again. No production takes place on such farms. My feeling is that they need to be made to farm themselves or sell their farms at reasonable prices to the

government," the councillor suggested.

Ephraim also warned that the new resettled farmers must learn to appreciate their farms more and work hard.

"I also want to warn prospective new farmers to make sure they inspect the farms they apply for because some of them turned such allocated farms down in the past when they realized the land was not suitable for their kind of farming, denying other landless people a piece of land," he said.

Reacting to alleged community complaints that most of the resettled farmers come from outside the Karas Region, Ephraim said: "These farms are put on tender for which people can apply. We have thus far accepted applications from around the country, including from prospective farmers in the Karas Region."

In Ephraim's opinion, there is a slight improvement in race relations between blacks and whites in the region.

"Although most whites still stick to themselves culturally and otherwise, a number have broken their self-imposed isolation in the region. More and more white people have started to attend public celebrations over the last few years. This is indeed an achievement for better race relations in a region with almost seventy thousand people living in it," he claimed.

Councillor Ephraim is very optimistic about the economic future of the Karas Region.
