

Minister van Rensburg Responds to Farm Worker Reports

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Gerrit van Rensburg, Western Cape Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, once again urges anyone with information on the implementation of the "dop-system", where farm workers in the Western Cape are allegedly being paid with wine, to come forth with information. "This is an evil practice and one we do not want to see in our Province or country." Van Rensburg reiterated that he sees any allegation of farm worker mistreatment in a very serious light.

Van Rensburg said that if there are problems in the agricultural sector, these need to be solved, not hidden away. "Problems should never be brushed under the carpet. But writing reports and visiting farms are not going to solve problems. We now want action."

Van Rensburg said he will personally, accompanied by Dan Plato, Western Cape Minister of Community Safety, hand the information to the police for further action. "Let me be very clear: Paying farm workers with wine is against the law. It is a crime and if you are found guilty, you will be punished by South African law."

Van Rensburg also responded on civil society organisations in support of the Human Rights Watch report on alleged farm worker abuses.

"The time for writing reports is now over. We now need action to solve the problems in order to avoid the same reports next year. Please provide me with detailed information as well as signed affidavits to support the claims. I will present it to the Department of Labour or the police, depending on who is the relevant authority."

Van Rensburg said that any organisation making claims and allegations should now do the honourable thing and report it to the authorities with signed affidavits. "If you know of a crime, you have a moral and legal obligation to report it. Please help us to bring the alleged perpetrators to book."

Van Rensburg declined invitations to join civil society organisations on incognito farm visits to witness alleged farm worker abuses. "Such visits will not solve any problems. As responsible Minister, I cannot act on rumours, which will only add oil to fire if found to be untrue."

"Civil society can play a valuable role in assisting people with affidavits and then in presenting it to me. The only solution is to present the abuses to the correct authorities, which are either the South African Police or the Department of Labour."

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