

Rural Development and Land Reform debate in the National Chamber of Provinces

21 June 2011

Speech delivered by Western Cape Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Gerrit van Rensburg.

Chair, Minister Nkwinti, provincial MEC's and officials: the past few days saw controversial and shocking newspaper headlines. It speaks of war and land grabs. It speaks of rural communities who are advised to organise themselves into protection units, ready to fight of any attempted land invasion.

These headlines are hurting us. It is damaging investor confidence in South Africa. It is causing grave concern amongst ordinary South African citizens. Many South African citizens are still looking towards the opportunities for a better life. But in the process, they are making the mistake to link land ownership on the one hand, with prosperity on the other hand.

Unfortunately, in the modern world the land question is much more complex. Wealth is only created on land that is used in a productive manner. Land that is not linked to the final consumer through an integrated value chain cannot create wealth. Creating wealth from the land is hard work. The same land that can be used for the creation of wealth can also create poverty if it is not used correctly.

Chair, these newspaper headlines are speaking, in an irresponsible manner, to our challenge of land reform and rural development. We, as the responsible officials, must take note of the urgency of the need for opportunities amongst our people.

Chair, some of us here today are not young anymore. Over time we have become grey, but with the grey hair comes better insight in people. With our age comes the wisdom to know that war is never the answer. Fighting does not solve problems. Land alone will not solve our problems. We need land and people to integrate with our economy in such a manner that jobs are created.

I am confident that we can solve our land challenges without straying beyond the boundaries so clearly set out in our Constitution. Respect for the rule of law, and the right to own property are two cornerstones from our Constitution on which we will build a prosperous South Africa.

I also know that between the extremes of those calling for war on the one hand; and those calling for the creation of rural protection units, on the other hand, the great majority of South Africans want something far more positive, peaceful and progressive.

Chair, it is on this middle group of citizens that I pin my hopes and dreams for South Africa. And we are already seeing the success stories of South Africans who are moving towards prosperity, with the help and support from other likeminded South Africans. We need to foster closer ties with the commercial farmers of South Africa. If we give them security, they will be our closest allies in land reform and rural development.

In Suurbraak, outside Swellendam, Dirk van Papendorp, a commercial farmer, assisted his neighbour, Dirk Willemse, a new farmer, to profitably produce and sell his first crop of coriander this year. Dirk Willemse's future life as a farmer in South Africa has been transformed. There is no financial gain involved for Dirk van Papendorp. He is just an ordinary South African who believes in a better future for all of us. Chair, success breeds success, and there are more bold future plans of this kind for the Suurbraak farmers, and I know they will be successful.

Chair, it is in this spirit that I want to acknowledge Minister Nkwinti for the cooperation and understanding he brings to land reform and rural development. The Western Cape Government is working together with Minister Nkwinti on several projects, the most notable one currently being Dysselsdorp.

We are all learning as we go along, but one fact that has crystallised over the past two years in Dysselsdorp is this: Without teamwork and commitment from all the different role players, rural development cannot succeed. National government; provincial government; local

government, and most important of all, the community itself, need to work together. In Dysseisdorp we are doing this, and positive results are already visible.

Unfortunately the opposite is also still happening. I recently visited a group of despondent farmers in the Western Cape who were given land where not the best farmer in South Africa will be able to make a living. These human tragedies happen when role-players work in silos, and the objectives of land reform, rural development and agriculture are not synchronised.

I want to thank Minister Nkwinti for lifting the moratorium on equity share schemes as a means of agricultural land reform and empowerment. Minister Nkwinti also initiated various workshops and symposiums on equity share schemes. I am confident that all current and future schemes will benefit from the new insights that were gained during this process.

I want to reaffirm the absolute commitment from agriculture in South Africa to the successful transformation and empowerment of black farmers. Together with the commercial farmers of South Africa we will see more examples such as Dirk Willemse, and fewer examples of despondent people who are being impoverished on land they can do nothing with.

We, as politicians and government officials, can contribute to successful land reform and rural development by creating the environment that will promote trust amongst people. We should not make radical statements that create mistrust and tension amongst South Africans. We must bring people with similar intentions together.

It is the responsibility of those with grey beards to see beyond short term political point scoring and focus on the work that needs to be done in order to create the environment where our grand- and great grandchildren can prosper.

Contact: Wouter Kriel, 021 483 4700, 079 694 3085, wouterkriel@gmail.com