

**KEY MESSAGE BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR CLR ERIC
LESETJA GWANGWA DURING THE FARMERS`
OUTREACH PROGRAMME HELD ON 10TH APRIL 2001
IN THABAZIMBI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

Programme Director,

Mayor of Thabazimbi Local Municipality Cde Naledi Matlou,

Councillors present,

Senior Management from government and municipalities,

Officials from government and municipality,

Farm workers,

Community members,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

THOBELA!!! DUMELANG.

I feel very honoured and would like to appreciate all stakeholders who initiated a programme of this magnitude. Your contribution to this outreach programme is commendable. In most cases farm workers and farm dwellers do not have the opportunity to attend programs that are coordinated by government and municipalities. This is because of the conditions that they find themselves.

Programme Director, the main objectives of this programme are amongst others:

- To bring government services to our target group being farm workers and dwellers;
- To analyse and present legislation, policies and practices affecting farm tenure relations;
- To understand the links between policy and tenure security of farm workers and farm dwellers;

- To suggest strategies to improve tenure security and livelihood for farm workers and farm dwellers.

Historical Background

- The historical background to the deplorable conditions endured by South African Farm workers lies generally in the South African history of colonial conquest and dispossession of the indigenous people.
- The 1913 Native Land Act, outlawed the ownership of land by blacks in areas designated for white ownership.
- The Act solidified the distribution of land that emerged from the era of colonial wars against indigenous tribes.
- This resulted into 87% of the South Africans being owned by whites whilst blacks owned only 13%.
- Preceding the Native Land Act, large number of black people occupied “white” farmland with the approval of the owner.
- This was only allowed because white farmers were unable to cultivate and till the land because of lack of capital.
- Sharecropping arrangements with black families who possessed draught animals, ploughs and labour became commonplace, especially in grain producing areas.
- Sharecropping was mostly essential for poor farmers whereas prosperous farmers were against the squatting by blacks on white farms.
- A large number of farm workers` community comprised of the descendents of people who may have occupied and farmed white owned land in a relatively independent manner.

Labour conditions

- Legal protection has been extended to farm workers through labour rights, however, there is generally a widespread non-compliance with labour laws.
- Extreme low wages, long hours, dangerous working conditions, victimisation of Trade Union members, child labour practices, use of “tot” system (whereby workers are given alcohol as component of their wages) and the use of illegal immigrants, are amongst the violations by farm owners.
- It is therefore clear that the protection of farm workers afforded by the Department of Labour is not enough and need to be beefed up.
- Farm workers still receive the lowest wages of any sector in the country.
- A minimum wage for farm workers has been proposed as presented by the Department of Labour, but some farm owners are not complying.
- Non compliance with working hours and payment of overtime is another challenge.
- Illegal farm workers are subjected to extreme abuse and exploitation.
- Violence against illegal farm workers is not usually reported. And call upon farm workers to report such cases to the police without fear or favour.

Violence against farm workers

- Assault against farm workers seems to be a common practice rather than an exception.
- It is also accompanied by conviction of the perpetrators.
- Many assaults also go unreported because of fear of victimisation by farm owners.
- Government also condemn the violent attacks to farm owners, mostly by criminal gangs.
- Farm workers are encouraged to provide information to the police in such cases.

Conclusion

- As government leaders, we are very concerned about the shocking conditions experienced by farm workers.
- We however, encourage the formation of a “Farming Community Forum”- wherein farm dwellers, farm owners and government can engage each other on equal basis to resolve issues that impede the enjoyment of rights in the farming community.
- A common understanding of the rights based approach needs to be promoted.
- The relationship between farm workers, farm dwellers and farm owners need to be improved.
- The ANC led government committed itself to provide a “ better life for all” which includes farm workers and farm dwellers.
- We also take note that the situation has improved compared to that under apartheid.
- Government is also making inroads into the property relations in South Africa`s rural areas so that farm workers should not remain the most oppressed, marginalised and exploited group within the South African working class.

We finally call upon all farm workers and farm dwellers gathered here to go all out and vote for the party of their choice on the 18th May 201.

I THANK YOU