

Media release

Agri Land Forum

The National Land Summit, held at Nasrec in Johannesburg over 5 days last week, has failed to address the one single factor that is hampering speedy delivery of land in all three land reform processes - poor administration and the lack of certain aspects of capacity in the Department of Land Affairs (DLA). Instead the principal focus of the summit seemed to be the willing buyer willing seller principle and further that the application of this principle can be seen as the reason for so much delay in the land restitution process. The Agri Land Forum has many examples of slow decision making within the restitution processes throughout South Africa and in every case the lack of decision making capacity in the DLA can be identified as the principal reason for non delivery.

Further, the notion that the state can intervene in the property market simply because it is the only buyer in a willing buyer, willing seller transaction, is false. Government has budgeted for little more than R700 mil. for its land reform program for this financial year. It has limited itself to these budgetary restrictions, **and that has nothing to do with willing or unwilling sellers**. Much to the frustration of both millions of landless people and the many willing sellers / land owners, who have offered to sell properties for land reform all over South Africa, the State cannot deliver on land reform simply because it has not budgeted for it. Even the threat of expropriation, which marked the summit, can only be interpreted within the confines of the budget, notwithstanding that expropriation is often much more expensive than the willing buyer, willing seller principle.

In reviewing the summit ALF are concerned that the premise upon which many of the closing resolutions were taken at the summit are untested. These should be challenged and confirmed by scientific research before making recommendations for the modification of government policy.

The one exception in the resolutions was that which called for a national land audit to establish the status, use, ownership and market position of all land in South Africa. ALF strongly supports this proposal as it will establish a sound foundation for further action. The philosophy often applied in agricultural businesses also applies here: *“What you can measure, you can manage.”*

The Agri Land Forum (ALF) has established formal working relations with both Agri-SA and TAU SA, and is actively engaged in discussions with NAFU on land reform. Despite these linkages ALF were not invited to the

summit. It seemed as though the Minister and summit organizers were determined not to have no more than 20 of the 1000 invited delegates there to voice the concerns of the active land owning community.

Given the above, ALF is concerned that the outcomes of the summit are not representative of all parties to land reform. Insofar as the participation of ALF, Government should not use as an excuse the premise that they have no knowledge of ALF. Government have been intensely engaged at every level in both the planning for and as speakers at the ALF *Horizons of Land Restitution* symposium initially planned for August 2005. ALF has postponed this summit from August to early 2006 specifically to give the Minister's land summit an opportunity to publish outcomes and constructive pointers for the way forward.

The summit was never clear on what land reform is expected to deliver. The goal of 30% of all land to be transferred to black owners before 2014 was not defined. If it means that 30% of the surface of our country should belong to black people, will it be measured per municipal district, including the vast semi-desert areas of the Northern Cape? Or does it refer to the total number of property title deeds? To adapt government's approach on a set of poorly defined goals could have potentially devastating consequences on the economy, and that spells disaster.

ALF believes that there is more than enough land available on the open market to achieve and exceed a goal of transferring 30% of all title deeds to black ownership. However the following should be considered . . .

1. That government owned land and land in tribal areas be added to the pool from which title can be transferred to beneficiaries of land reform, and . . .
2. That urban properties, currently occupied by city dwellers in informal settlements, also be included.

To demonstrate this ALF has decided to work with its allies in organized agriculture to compile a list of properties in each municipal area that is available for land reform on a willing seller basis. It will submit the list to the minister, and agree with her on a procedure to transfer the land. This procedure must address sound administration and limited time tables to conclude transactions. It should also include fast valuations, checked by local valuation panels consisting of professional valuers, banks, estate agents, and trained and experienced government officials. This approach will ensure reasonable market valuations and should hasten the sale and transfer of these land areas to determine market value.

The one significant outcome from the summit has been to move land reform up on the national agenda, and set it as a non negotiable priority. In this regard ALF is appalled by the lack of involvement of commercial banks, mining companies and agri-business not only at the summit but in the issue of land reform at large – albeit with the exception of the Land Bank. These stakeholders have as much, if not more, at stake.

Finally, farmers and other land owners, whilst recognising that land reform is one of the biggest challenges South Africa faces post 1994, are tired of hosting parasites on their many initiatives to engage both government and the beneficiaries of land reform. If constructive and sustainable solutions are to be found land owners should participate when Government discusses mechanisms to transfer land and the associated financial implications. In addition farmers and land owners should also participate in the post-settlement dispensation given that South Africa cannot afford productive land to be neglected as a result of a lack of expertise and or resources. Their absence from and Government's silence on this issue are seen as a major stumbling block towards successful land reform, and can no longer be tolerated..

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