

‘BOOBY TRAP FOR RAMAPHOSA’

Pace of land reform ‘pathetic’

Lyse Comins

THE government's pace and quality of land reform has been "pathetic" but the flare up of racist nationalism calling for land to be expropriated and returned without compensation to "indigenous people" raised questions about who the designated group of beneficiaries should be.

This was the criticism Deputy Minister of Public Works Jeremy Cronin levelled against the status quo of land reform when addressing hundreds of property professionals at the South African Property Owners Association's Annual Convention and Property Exhibition at the Durban International Convention Centre yesterday.

Cronin said the country was facing crisis levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality and popular anger and frustration had often now condensed around the emotive call for "stolen land to be returned without compensation".

"We are seeing a flaring up of racist nationalism. For instance when you are saying the land must be returned to the indigenous people, who are the indigenous people?"

"And what are you saying to the so-called coloured people and the descendants of people who came to SA as indentured labourers," Cronin said.

He added the land issue was a "problematic diversion" but also provided the opportunity to focus on these challenges.

"The pace and quality of land reform has been weak. I should say pathetic for many reasons."

"The high level panel of president Kgalema Motlalehi has spoken candidly about the challenges of land reform and basically attributed it to weak policy, corruption in the state, to a lack of will and capacity," Cronin said.

The report concluded that the land reform process had failed and also recommended the scrapping of the Ingonyama Trust. It also noted that it would take 30 years to settle old order land restitution claims and 140 years to settle new claims that were opened under former president Jacob Zuma.

Cronin said the ANC's adoption of the resolution to pursue land expropriation without compensation had emerged as a "booby trap" for President Cyril Ramaphosa following "a highly divided, hugely factious" ANC national conference in December.

"One very senior ANC person said the expropriation without compensation was basically a booby trap for Cyril Ramaphosa... damned if he does damned if he doesn't. If he does it then he is going to lose his investment lines going out into the world looking for \$100 million and if he doesn't do it, the other faction inside the ANC will say he is not implementing an ANC resolution, let's have a national general council and elect a new leader," Cronin said.

He said the resolution itself was

an "oxymoron" that reflected the voices of two varying camps.

The resolution, said Cronin, sought expropriation of land without compensation as among "the key mechanisms to give effect to land reform and redistribution" while on the other hand aiming to "not undermine future investment in the economy or damage agricultural production or food security."

"As problematic as the resolution may be it has opened up an important possibility to ask the question, why are we in a situation where there is still such radical inequality in South Africa, especially around land," Cronin said. He said the acquisition of land was not the problem because the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform had 5000 farms which had not yet been allocated. Cronin said the ANC's position on the issue was different from the EFF and it was debatable whether the constitution needed to be changed in terms of the resolution.

"The ANC's amendment doesn't explicitly call for a change in the constitution. One of its (the committee's) tasks is to consider whether it is necessary to amend or not. In fact that it is undesirable to amend the constitution but then we have

the challenge of meeting the ANC resolution," Cronin said.

He said Section 25 (b) of the constitution provided the mandate for expropriation without compensation.

Political analyst Bukani Mangoma said: "If one reads the resolution it is couched in such a way that there is an element of the need to expropriate but such expropriation should be balanced with economic interests. It is almost like a protection in the resolution. It is not open ended. Like the resolution the EFF is proposing," Mangoma said.

ANC provincial co-ordinator Sibhe Zikalala said the expropriation of land was based on the failed process of land redistribution and restitution and the party agreed with Cronin that corruption had been part of the problem.

Zikalala said the problem lay with commercial farms that had been taken from people, who were languishing in poverty as a result.

He said the resolution had not been a "booby trap" for Ramaphosa.

"To come with that view is wrong and I don't think that comrade Jeremy would stoop to that level of trying to create suspicion around the programme of the organisation."

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