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SPEECH

MINISTER MACPHERSON OUTLINES STEPS TO RESTORE THE RULE OF LAW AT KNOFLOKSKRAAL

(Note to editors: The following address was delivered by the Minister of Public Works & Infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, at a press briefing surrounding Knoflokskraal at the GCIS Imbizo Centre in the Parliamentary Precinct in Cape Town. He was joined by Western Cape Premier Alan Winde, Western Cape Minister for Infrastructure, Tertuis Simmers, and Theewaterskloof municipal mayor, Lincoln de Bruyn. A copy of the presentation the Minister delivered can be found [here](#).)

- Public Works & Infrastructure Minister Dean Macpherson outlined a clear, structured plan to restore the rule of law at Knoflokskraal, following years of unlawful occupation, weak enforcement, and failed interventions.
- The Minister detailed serious allegations of criminal activity on the site, including illegal land sales, intimidation, and organised operations, warning that “cases without consequence do not restore the rule of law.”
- Government will now implement a coordinated response centred on containment, social facilitation, direct community engagement, and strengthened law enforcement to reassert control over state-owned land.

We have called this press conference because the government, both nationally, provincial and locally, has reached a point where it must speak plainly about matters regarding the rule of law on state-owned land and decisively, to restore public confidence that the rule of law still matters.

At its heart, this is what today is about.

It is about the rule of law.

It is about whether South Africa, as a constitutional democracy, is prepared to uphold the law on state-owned land.

It is about whether the state will act when public land is unlawfully occupied, and the rule of law begins to break down.

It is about whether the government will act when officials are intimidated, when law enforcement struggles to operate, and when serious allegations of criminality are allowed to take root in the absence of decisive action.

And it is about whether we are willing to restore order in a way that is lawful, firm, and constitutionally defensible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we are here to address the situation at Knoflokskraal in the Elgin Valley near Grabouw in the Western Cape.

Let me be clear about what that means in practice.

It means acting because the Constitution requires the state to govern lawfully and for EVERYONE's rights to be protected.

It means acting because public land cannot simply be surrendered to lawlessness and intimidation.

It means acting because the rights of vulnerable people are not protected when criminality flourishes unchecked.

And it means acting because no democratic government can allow intimidation, violence, threats, misinformation and unlawful conduct to become normalised.

That is why we are here today as national, provincial and local government.

We are here to explain how Knoflokskraal reached this point.

We are here to set out the current reality on the ground.

And we are here to explain the pathway forward.

Because the current situation cannot continue.

It should never have been allowed to get to this point, but it did because of politics and an unwillingness to do the right thing.

And the rule of law must be restored.

The history and build-up to the current crisis

Ladies and gentlemen,

To understand why we are here today, we must begin with a clear understanding of what Knoflokskraal is.

Knoflokskraal is a large parcel of state land situated just off the N2 between Grabouw and Botrivier in the Theewaterskloof area.

It covers roughly 1,800 hectares, and while it is owned by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, it was earmarked by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment for forestry purposes

In other words, this was strategic government property intended to support forestry production, investment and jobs in the region. That has never happened and is the opportunity cost of what we see there today.

The land was first unlawfully occupied in 2020, during the height of COVID-19.

Reporting and official updates indicate that the occupation began in late 2020, with a small initial group moving onto the land to establish what they described as a self-sustaining Khoisan community.

What began as a small occupation did not remain small for long.

It steadily expanded over time, eventually growing into a large and entrenched unlawful settlement actively led by political groupings ahead of the local government election in 2021

That growth did not happen in a vacuum.

During the Sixth Administration, considerable time, effort and financial resources were invested by all three spheres of government in attempting to engage with the Knoflokskraal community and its various leadership structures.

The intention was to find a workable solution to the growing unlawful occupation, reduce tensions on the ground, and prevent the matter from escalating further.

But while there was engagement, there was not enough implementation.

While there were processes, there were not enough outcomes.

And while the state was talking, the occupation was growing rapidly.

In 2021, containment orders were granted by the Western Cape High Court for three of the six farms that collectively make up Knoflokskraal.

But those orders were not enforced with the consistency, urgency and coordination required to give effect to them.

The legal authority existed.

The sustained implementation and political will did not.

At the same time, there were repeated engagements with members of the community and various leadership structures.

But those engagements did not translate into concrete and durable action on the ground.

Instead, progress stalled, the occupation deepened, and the rule of law was overlooked and broken, piece by piece.

The consequences of that failure became increasingly serious.

By 2022 and 2023, the occupation had spread significantly, causing damage to land earmarked for forestry and undermining the original purpose for which the property had been set aside.

Furthermore, in some places, the land had become unsalvageable for future forestry purposes, with irreversible damage done to plantations, while the occupation had spread across multiple properties.

The legacy of that period is now plain for all to see.

There was a lack of alignment between the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, COGTA, SAPS, and local government.

There was no single authority clearly driving implementation and accountability.

Decision-making was too slow.

Law enforcement responses were too weak.

The N2 was repeatedly disrupted by protests linked to the occupation, which required the South African Police Service to repeatedly intervene, diverting attention and resources from communities that needed them.

The local municipality faced severe financial and capacity constraints due to the requirement to provide basic services and electricity, which it does for free at a cost of R11 million a year.

Distrust deepened between the community, surrounding farmers and the state.

And throughout this period, allegations of criminality persisted without being adequately confronted.

In simple terms, the state engaged, but it did not restore order.

The effect of that failure was predictable.

Once an unlawful occupation is allowed to expand without consequence, it becomes harder to reverse.

When this unwillingness to enforce the containment orders was found to be weak, unlawful actors became emboldened.

It was in this vacuum that organised criminality was allowed to flourish.

By the time the Seventh Administration began, it was clear that the previous approach had not resolved the problem.

On the contrary, the problem had become significantly worse.

There had been no tangible progress despite extensive prior engagement, and the only unmistakable development was the continued expansion of the occupation itself.

That is the history we inherited.

And that history matters, because it explains why the current administration concluded that Knoflokskraal could no longer be managed through drift, threats, intimidation, political pressure, fragmented engagement, and reactive responses.

It had to be approached differently.

It had to be approached with structure.

It had to be approached with coordination.

And above all, it had to be approached through the lens of restoring the rule of law.

What the current administration did

Before I turn to the situation on the ground today, it is important to explain what this administration did when it inherited this crisis.

From the outset, I made Knoflokskraal a personal priority.

I was not prepared to accept a situation where the rule of law was repeatedly broken, where state land was being unlawfully occupied, and where the government simply continued to drift without a clear plan.

That is why this matter was elevated to a Ministerial Priority Project and placed under the Strategic and Special Delivery Unit in the Office of the Director-General, so that it could receive focused oversight, urgent attention and direct accountability.

But I also want to make something else equally clear.

Before taking further steps, we made an extraordinary effort to resolve this matter through engagement.

And I say extraordinary deliberately, because it is not common for a Minister to be personally involved at this level of operational detail in relation to a single site.

Yet that is exactly what I did here.

I personally drove this process because I wanted to ensure that every possible avenue for a lawful, peaceful and negotiated solution was fully exhausted before stronger measures were taken.

Following a multi-stakeholder engagement in August 2025, the government took a deliberate decision to engage directly with the established leadership structures in the community through the Knoflokskraal Community Task Team, or KCTT, in pursuit of a negotiated solution that would allow containment and social facilitation to proceed in a structured and lawful way.

We engaged extensively.

We exchanged formal correspondence.

We convened a bilateral meeting on 24 October 2025.

And those engagements ultimately resulted in an in-principle agreement to enter into a Social Compact Agreement, via a letter dated 5 December 2025.

That was an important breakthrough because it suggested that there was a lawful pathway forward that could balance engagement with the restoration of order.

But that agreement was not honoured.

Instead of moving the process forward, it introduced objections and demands that made implementation impossible.

In effect, government negotiated in good faith, reached an understanding in good faith, and then found that the other side had reneged on that understanding.

That is deeply regrettable.

Because government came to that process willing to engage, willing to listen, and willing to find a lawful and peaceful way forward.

But engagement cannot be allowed to become a mechanism to delay action indefinitely while unlawful occupation expands, intimidation continues, and the rule of law continues to erode.

At some point, government has to conclude that it has acted in good faith, that it has gone further than would ordinarily be expected, and that the broader public interest now requires decisive action.

That is the point we have reached at Knoflokskraal.

It is against this background that we must now understand the current situation on the ground.

Government has engaged.

Government has negotiated.

Government has acted in good faith.

And that is precisely why we must now act.

The current situation

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you can see, the current situation at Knoflokskraal is serious, entrenched and unsustainable.

What may once have been described as a localised unlawful occupation has now grown into an unsanctioned large-scale settlement on state-owned land, with approximately 4,000 structures and an estimated population of between 15,000 and 20,000 people residing on site.

But the scale of the occupation is not the only concern.

The far more serious issue is what has taken root in the absence of effective law enforcement.

At present, Knoflokskraal is a space where, in many respects, the rule of law does not exist.

There have been instances where departmental officials have been unable to access parts of the site at all.

In effect, there are areas within Knoflokskraal that are off limits to the department, which is the lawful custodian of the land.

That is a deeply concerning position for any democratic government to be in and is, frankly, unprecedented.

Law enforcement presence has been inconsistent and, in some instances, absent and ineffective.

This is not a sustainable situation in a constitutional democracy.

And the consequences of this breakdown are not contained within the boundaries of Knoflokskraal.

Firstly, it is placing an unsustainable burden on the local municipality.

The reality is that while this land is unlawfully occupied, there are growing demands for services - water, sanitation and electricity - from a community that exists outside of any lawful planning framework.

At the same time, municipal officials face serious challenges in accessing the site safely and consistently.

This creates an impossible situation: a demand for services without lawful planning, without proper access, and without the ability of the state to operate freely.

That is not sustainable governance.

It is the direct consequence of lawlessness.

Secondly, the surrounding area is home to productive agricultural land that plays an important role in the Western Cape's economy, supporting jobs, exports and food production.

When lawlessness takes root on neighbouring state land, it creates uncertainty, risk and instability for those farms and the communities that depend on them.

It affects investment confidence.

It affects livelihoods.

And it affects the broader stability of the region.

This is therefore not only a local issue.

It is a matter that has implications for the wider Western Cape.

But the most troubling aspect of the current situation is the extent of alleged criminality that has taken root.

Over a sustained period, government has received numerous allegations relating to unlawful and criminal activity taking place on the site.

These include:

- The prevalence of illicit drug activity
- The unlawful subdivision and sale of state land
- The construction of permanent brick-and-mortar structures
- The intimidation and harassment of officials and contractors

- Allegations of abalone-related criminal activity
- Reports of shootings
- And claims that the site may be used as a staging point for the storage and movement of drugs and weapons into other parts of the Western Cape

And what is even more concerning is not only the nature of these allegations, but the lack of progress in addressing them.

Cases have been opened.

But cases without consequence do not restore the rule of law.

To illustrate this point, there are multiple cases that have been opened at Grabouw SAPS relating to activities at Knoflokskraal.

These include, for example:

- case number 166/05/2021,
- 254/03/2021,
- 248/08/2021,
- 53/09/2021,
- 206/09/2021,
- 270/05/2020,
- 144/11/2020,

and enquiry 1/09/2022 relating to fraud.

These cases span offences including trespassing, theft, housebreaking and fraud.

Some resulted in arrests that were later withdrawn.

Others remain under investigation with no arrests.

The pattern is clear: cases have been opened, but accountability has not followed.

They risk reinforcing the perception that unlawful activity can continue without accountability.

Yet there has been little to no meaningful progress in those investigations.

There has been limited feedback from law enforcement.

And in some instances, there has been no visible consequence for those allegedly involved.

Because where there are allegations of this magnitude, on a site of this scale, on state-owned land, in close proximity to the N2 corridor, inaction is not neutral.

Inaction enables further lawlessness.

We are also aware of a recent shooting incident reported on the site.

In addition, there was a recent incident where a fire was reported within Knoflokskraal.

When firefighters responded to the scene to carry out their duties, they were reportedly threatened at gunpoint.

That is completely unacceptable.

It means that even emergency services - those who are there to protect life and property - are unable to operate freely and safely.

And it is a stark illustration of the level of lawlessness that has taken hold.

There are not minor developments.

It is a clear indication of the level of risk and instability that has taken hold.

And it reinforces the urgent need for law enforcement to reassert its presence.

Among the most disturbing allegations are those relating to the unlawful sale of land.

Government has received documentation indicating that plots are being allocated and sold by individuals or groups with no lawful authority to do so, in some instances for amounts as low as R1,500.

What we are seeing is the exploitation of vulnerable people - individuals who may believe they are securing land, when in reality they are being sold something that no one has the legal right to sell.

It is people being misled into paying for land under false pretences.

And it is the creation of a parallel, unlawful system that benefits those who control it - not those who are drawn into it.

This is the very definition of a criminal syndicate.

Similarly, the presence of permanent structures, heavy machinery and organised commercial activity - including cafés, a flea market and even a bed and breakfast - points to a level of coordination and entrenchment that cannot be ignored.

This is no longer a temporary occupation.

It is a developing parallel settlement operating outside the law.

It is also important to note that there are indications that some of these structures are not primary residences, but are instead used as secondary homes or additional properties.

This further reinforces the concern that what is taking place at Knoflokskraal is not solely driven by housing need but includes elements of opportunistic and organised activity.

Slideshow of pictures

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this point, I want to take you through a series of images and documents that illustrate the current reality at Knoflokskraal.

Because while I have described the situation at Knoflokskraal, it is important that you see for yourselves what is taking place on the ground.

These visuals are not presented for effect.

They are presented as evidence.

Evidence of the scale of the occupation.

Evidence of the level of organisation.

And evidence of activities that raise serious concerns about legality, governance and control.

SLIDE 2 - BEFORE (May 2020)

This image shows the site as it existed in May 2020.

At this stage, the land remained largely undeveloped, with no significant structures or settlements visible.

SLIDE 3 - AFTER (April 2025)

This image shows the same area in April 2025.

What you can clearly see is the rapid and extensive expansion of the occupation.

This is not incremental growth - it is large-scale, unregulated development on state land.

SLIDE 4 & 5 - SALE OF GOVERNMENT LAND

These images provide evidence of the unlawful sale of government land.

They include proof of payments and documentation indicating that individuals are being charged for plots of land.

In some cases, these plots are sold for as little as R1,500.

This is not a lawful land allocation.

It is the exploitation of vulnerable people, who are being misled into believing they are acquiring legitimate rights.

SLIDE 6-10 — BRICK-AND-MORTAR STRUCTURES

These images show the construction of permanent brick-and-mortar structures on the site.

This reflects a level of permanence and entrenchment that goes far beyond a temporary or informal occupation.

It indicates a deliberate and organised effort to establish a permanent settlement outside of any lawful planning or approval processes.

SLIDE 11-12 - DIGGER / LOADER ON SITE

These images show heavy construction equipment operating on site.

This raises serious questions about how such equipment is able to access and operate on unlawfully occupied land.

It further points to a level of organisation and coordination that cannot be ignored.

SLIDE 13 - BUILDING MATERIALS

This image shows ongoing and repeated attempts to bring building materials onto the site.

This demonstrates that expansion is not only ongoing, but actively being facilitated.

SLIDE 14 - ROAD BLOCKING

This image shows the blocking of roads when tensions arise.

This has a direct impact on surrounding communities, commuters, and economic activity in the area.

It is further evidence of how this situation extends beyond the site itself.

SLIDE 15 - CAFÉ

This image shows the presence of a café operating on site.

This reflects the emergence of commercial activity within the occupation.

SLIDE 16 - BED & BREAKFAST

And this image shows the presence of a bed and breakfast facility.

This illustrates just how normalised and entrenched this unlawful situation has become.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These images speak for themselves.

They remove any doubt about the scale and nature of what is taking place.

They demonstrate that what is taking place at Knoflokskraal is not simply a matter of land occupation.

It is a situation that has become organised, entrenched, and deeply concerning from a rule of law perspective.

Mayor Lincoln de Bruyn who joins us here today has been forced to wear a bullet-proof vest because of threats linked to this situation.

Officials have been intimidated.

Contractors have been obstructed.

Security has been challenged.

And communities have been placed in an environment where fear and uncertainty can thrive.

That is not governance.

That is the breakdown of the rule of law.

So, the question before us is no longer whether government must act.

The question is whether the government is prepared to restore the rule of law.

And the answer is clear:

We will.

As the Minister of Public Works, I have been absolutely clear that no single person has the right to invade state-owned land, and that we will take strong action against those who do.

From hijacking state buildings and land to unlawfully occupying land outside the Union Buildings, we act without fear or favour to ensure the rule of law is respected, and our assets are reclaimed and protected.

We have demonstrated this repeatedly across the country.

The pathway forward

Ladies and gentlemen,

Having set out the history and the current reality, let me now turn to the pathway forward.

Government's approach is clear.

It is structured.

It is rooted in the Constitution.

And it is designed to restore the rule of law while creating the basis for an evidence-based and defensible long-term intervention.

That pathway forward rests on three pillars.

The first pillar is containment.

Knoflokskraal currently has multiple active access points that have enabled the continued movement of people and materials onto the site in violation of the 2021 Western Cape High Court order.

If the state is serious about stopping further unlawful expansion, those access points must be formalised and controlled.

Containment is therefore the first necessary step.

As part of this containment effort, the Department will also implement aerial and on-site mapping to establish a clear and accurate picture of conditions within Knoflokskraal.

This includes the use of technology to map structures, monitor movement, and understand the extent of activity on the site.

This step is necessary because, at present, there are areas where we do not have full visibility or access due to security issues

Restoring the rule of law requires restoring visibility.

Because government cannot enforce the law in areas it cannot properly see, access or monitor.

This is therefore not an optional step.

It is a foundational step in re-establishing control and ensuring that all further interventions are based on credible, verified information.

And let me be very clear: containment is not eviction.

Containment is the act of restoring order to a site that has been allowed to expand in a largely uncontrolled manner.

It is the prerequisite for any meaningful intervention.

Without containment, there can be no stability.

Without stability, there can be no credible social facilitation.

And without social facilitation, the government cannot make lawful, rational and defensible decisions about the future of the site.

The second pillar is social facilitation.

Once containment is in place, government will proceed with a structured social facilitation process.

That process will include the profiling of residents, the mapping of structures, the development of a community profile, the collection of demographic and socio-economic information, engagement with leadership and stakeholders, the identification of groupings on the site, the assignment of identifiers to structures, and the documentation of any cultural or heritage-based claims.

This is essential for one simple reason: government cannot govern blindly.

Government cannot respond on the basis of hearsay.

Government cannot determine an appropriate long-term intervention without first knowing who is on the site, how they came to be there, what their circumstances are, and what criminality may be embedded within the current situation.

Social facilitation is therefore not a side issue.

It is central to restoring the rule of law, because the rule of law depends on facts.

The third pillar is direct community engagement.

Government has concluded that it must speak directly to residents, not only through intermediaries or contested leadership structures.

The communication plan provides for the distribution of pamphlets at access points, clear explanations of containment and social facilitation, and channels through which residents can provide feedback anonymously if necessary.

Residents will be invited to share how they came to live at Knoflokskraal, how they would like to be engaged, and what they know about alleged corruption, illegal land sales and intimidation.

The feedback process is intended to begin in May 2026.

This matters deeply.

Because in a site where fear and misinformation appear to be widespread, direct engagement is essential.

It gives ordinary residents a voice.

It allows the state to distinguish between those who may be vulnerable and those who may be exploiting the situation.

And it creates the possibility that those with information about corruption, intimidation or unlawful land sales can come forward without fear of reprisal.

Alongside these three pillars is a fourth imperative that runs through them all: law enforcement and accountability.

Criminal cases have been opened over a number of years, yet progress has been limited and feedback insufficient.

The current administration has therefore written to the Minister of Police to request a comprehensive update on investigations linked to Knoflokskraal.

There are also allegations that municipal staff and police may have been bribed or compromised.

If those allegations are proven, they would represent a profound betrayal of public trust and must be met with the full consequences of the law.

The era of looking away must end.

If state officials are involved, they must be held accountable.

If syndicates are operating, they must be exposed.

The sale of public land illegally must be stopped.

That is what restoring the rule of law means in practice.

It means stopping further unlawful expansion.

It means gathering credible facts.

It means protecting the vulnerable.

It means exposing criminality.

And it means ensuring that the state, not unlawful actors, determines what happens on state-owned land.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

Knoflokskraal cannot continue on its current path because we will see more examples of it across the country if we don't act now.

The current situation is unsustainable.

It is unlawful.

And it is increasingly dangerous.

It is dangerous for the residents who may be vulnerable.

It is dangerous for the surrounding communities.

It is dangerous for municipal governance.

It is dangerous for officials on the ground.

We cannot allow a situation where public land is unlawfully occupied without consequence.

We cannot allow intimidation to silence public representatives and officials.

We cannot allow organised criminality to entrench itself on state land.

At the same time, we must remain faithful to the Constitution.

We will act lawfully.

We will act carefully.

We will act on the basis of evidence.

We will act in a way that is fair, transparent and defensible.

But we will act.

Because the rule of law is not negotiable.

A constitutional democracy cannot have spaces where the law does not apply.

It is the foundation of our democracy.

It is what protects the rights of every South African.

And it is what ensures that no one, no matter how organised, how threatening or how entrenched, is above the law.

Today is not the end of the process.

But it is a clear step forward.

A step toward restoring order.

A step toward establishing the truth.

And a step toward ensuring that Knoflokskraal is addressed in a manner worthy of a constitutional democracy.

The rule of law will be restored.

I thank you.

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