

'The time for reconciliation is over': South Africa votes to confiscate white-owned land without compensation

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SOUTH Africa's parliament has voted in favour of a motion that will begin the process of amending the country's Constitution to allow for the confiscation of white-owned land without compensation.

The motion was brought by Julius Malema, leader of the radical Marxist opposition party the Economic Freedom Fighters, and passed overwhelmingly by 241 votes to 83 against. The only parties who did not support the motion were the Democratic Alliance, Freedom Front Plus, Cope and the African Christian Democratic Party.

It was amended but supported by the ruling African National Congress and new president Cyril Ramaphosa, who made land expropriation a key pillar of his policy platform after taking over from ousted PM Jacob Zuma earlier this month.

"The time for reconciliation is over. Now is the time for justice," Mr Malema was quoted by News24 as telling parliament. "We must ensure that we restore the dignity of our people without compensating the criminals who stole our land."

According to Bloomberg, a 2017 government audit found white people owned 72 per cent of farmland in South Africa.

ANC deputy chief whip Dorries Eunice Dlakude said the party "recognises that the current policy instruments, including the willing-buyer willing-seller policy and other provisions of Section 25 of the Constitution may be hindering effective land reform".

ANC rural affairs minister Gugile Nkwinti added, "The ANC unequivocally supports the principle of land expropriation without compensation. There is no doubt about it, land shall be expropriated without compensation."

Thandeka Mbabama from the Democratic Alliance party, which opposed the motion, said there was a need to right the wrongs of the past but expropriation “cannot be part of the solution”. “By arguing for expropriation without compensation, the ANC has been gifted the perfect scapegoat to explain away its own failure,” she said in a statement.

“Making this argument lets the ANC off the hook on the real impediments — corruption, bad policy and chronic underfunding. Expropriation without compensation would severely undermine the national economy, only hurting poor black people even further.”

Pieter Groenewald, leader of the Freedom Front Plus party representing the white Afrikaner minority, asked what would happen to the land once it was expropriated. “If you continue on this course, I can assure you there is going to be unforeseen consequences that is not in the interest of South Africa,” he said.



South African president Cyril Ramaphosa. Picture: Rodger Bosch/AFPSource:AFP



Protesters rally against deadly farm attacks. Picture: Gulshan Khan/AFPSource:AFP

Cope leader Mosiuoa Lekota said there was a “danger that those who think equality in our lifetime equates that we must dominate whites”, News24 reported.

Mr Malema has been leading calls for land confiscation, forcing the ANC to follow suit out of fear of losing the support of poorer black voters. In 2016, he told supporters he was “not calling for the slaughter of white people, at least for now”.

Civil rights groups have accused the EFF and ANC of inciting an ongoing spate of attacks on white farmers characterised by extreme brutality, rape and torture — last year, more than 70 people were killed in more than 340 such attacks.

Ernst Roets, deputy chief executive of civil rights group Afriforum, said the parliamentary motion was a violation of the 1994 agreement in which the ANC promised minority interests would be protected post-apartheid.

“This motion is based on a distorted image of the past,” Mr Roets said in a statement. “The term ‘expropriation without compensation’ is a form of semantic fraud. It is nothing more than racist theft.”

He earlier hit out at “simply deceitful” claims that “white people who own land necessarily obtained it by means of oppression, violence or forced removals”.

“The EFF’s view on redistribution is merely a racist process to chase white people off their land and establish it within the state,” he said. “This is not only deceiving, but also a duplication of the economic policies that the world’s worst economies put in place.”

Afriforum said it would take its fight to the United Nations if necessary. The matter has been referred to the parliament’s Constitutional Review Committee, which must report back by August 30.

Earlier this month, Louis Meintjes, president of the farmers’ group the Transvaal Agricultural Union, warned the country risked going down the same route as Zimbabwe, which plunged into famine after a government-sanctioned purge of white farmers in the 2000s.

“Where in the world has expropriation without compensation coupled to the waste of agricultural land, resulted in foreign confidence, economic growth and increased food production?” Mr Meintjes said.

“If Mr Ramaphosa is set on creating an untenable situation, he should actively create circumstances which will promote famine. His promise to expropriate land without compensation, sows the seed for revolution. Expropriation without compensation is theft”.

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