

Statement by Ernst Roets, Deputy CEO of AfriForum

United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

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AfriForum is a minority rights organisation operating within South Africa. Our organisation represents more than 150'000 individual members of minority communities. As part of the broader Solidarity Movement, we represent more than 300'000 people. In addition, during the last three weeks we have gathered the names of about 100'000 concerned South Africans who stated that they support our presentation here.

Our issue is with the growing concern of farm murders in South Africa – a phenomenon that largely targets minority communities and also a phenomenon that is largely ignored by the South African government and the South African police in particular. Not only does the South African government refuse to implement a focused counter strategy that will assist in combating this crime phenomenon, we also find that victims of these attacks – the survivors, as well as those whose loved ones have been murdered – are sometimes even mocked and ridiculed by senior officials within the South African government.

Due to time constraints, I will only touch on some of the issues and case studies that are explained in our report in more detail.

The majority of commercial farmers in South Africa are members of minority communities. We find that these farmers are constantly used as a political punching bag by the South African government and senior officials within the ruling party, the ANC.

While South Africa already has an extremely high murder rate, we find that South African commercial farmers are murdered at a ratio about 4 times as high as the general murder ratio in South Africa. In many cases, these victims are subjected to extreme levels of brutality and torture. In our research, we have also found that there is an alarming amount of cases where the attackers use racial or political rhetoric during these attacks.

The irony is that, while the South African government is in denial about the extent of the crisis, attacks on South African farmers used to be treated as a priority crime by the South African government. In 2007, official government statistics showed a 25% increase in farm attacks. After publication of this alarming figure, the South African government announced that no further statistics will be published regarding these attacks.

Although no official statistics exist anymore, in the hearts and minds of minority communities, the problem has worsened.

We now find that these attacks not only continue, but also that gross levels of discrimination are experienced by the victims of these attacks within the criminal justice system. Our report includes various case studies, highlighting the extent of the problem. We find that in many cases, police officials are slow to react to these attacks, that forensic

evidence is not collected, or that pieces of evidence are lost after collection, often leading to a finding that the accused are not guilty. Other than that, the victims experience that they are treated like perpetrators during the process.

We call on the distinguished representatives present here to take note of this alarming phenomenon and also to take the matter up with the South African government in your deliberations with them. In the mean time, we will continue to do what we can to ensure that the lives and dignity of our communities are protected.

Our report has been submitted and copies are available. I will also provide copies to any other parties who are interested in receiving more information about this alarming phenomenon.

Ernst Roets
Deputy CEO
AfriForum