

Nearly 5,000 land claims processed in two weeks

The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform has processed almost 5,000 applications from claimants since President Jacob Zuma assented to a law that re-opened the lodgement of land claims.



(Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Zuma assented to the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act, 2014 (Act No. 15 of 2014) at the end of last month, which re-opened the lodgement of land claims on 1 July for another five years.

Briefing members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Rural Development and Land Reform at the department's Mowbray regional office, Nomfundo Gobodo, the Chief Land Claims Commissioner, said the process had gone smoothly ever since it was re-opened.

"As at 25 July 2014, the claims captured over the past four weeks increased to 4,917.

"The electronic lodgement system has been stable and all 14 lodgement sites are fully operational," she said.

Gobodo said normal system problems that they have experienced were attended to by the support team and were resolved immediately.

She said, however, that it was difficult to anticipate how many claimants would come forward on a daily basis, but her office had the capacity to facilitate all claims.

Early data showed that 300 claims have been lodged across all lodgement offices on a daily bases, she said.

It is estimated that 7.5 million people were alienated from their land after the 1913 Land Act was signed into law. To date, only 1.7 million individuals have benefitted from the restitution programme.

A bulk of the new claims is expected to come from individuals and communities who were left out and are aware of their

rights. The previous round of claims was done between 1994 and 1998.

Claims that could not be finalised during the pre-1998 round would be prioritised, Gobodo said.

The department will deploy mobile offices to rural areas to help people, who might not be able to afford transport to prepare their claims.

This will be a process of ensuring that they have everything they need to lodge a valid claim, from the identity documents or information of the persons or relatives they may be claiming on their behalf, to insure their claims are not disqualified due to a lack of information.

Phumzile Ngwenya-Mabila, the chairperson of the portfolio committee, said the visit by Members of Parliament (MPs) was aimed at assessing the lodgement process and the progress made since the second phase was opened.

The visit also gave them an opportunity to assess government's implementation plans, capacity and turnaround time to administer the claims.

She told journalists that the visit would arm the committee with all the information they need when they go back to Parliament for them to exercise their oversight role over the department.

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