

Slow progress on land reform

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Land reform is progressing slowly in SA because of a lack of comprehensive systems in the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform and the fact that deeds and other records do not say which race owns what land.



Image: GCS

This is according to Rural Development and Land Reform Minister Gugile Nkwinti, who also said during a media briefing on Friday (22 February) that an initial ban on foreigners owning land in SA related only to agriculture for the time being.

"A major problem with the slow progress is the lack of systems. We need systems and I have instructed the (land reform) department to put them in place," he said.

Nkwinti said he initially had not been able to tell how much of the R6bn that the government had paid for land restitution could be translated into hectares. He said the systems showed that this came to about 230,000ha.

"But we have been told that our systems and research was so weak that people have been left out (of the land restitution process)," he said.

The minister said some of the assumptions on which the original land restitution policy had been based were flawed. "We were shocked when people came to us and said they did not want the land but rather wanted cash instead," he said.

Nkwinti also said that when his department examined land title deeds it had to liaise with other departments such as home affairs and trade and industry to determine whether a piece of land was owned by someone of a particular race or a foreigner.

"As apartheid had been based on race, so the land reform process also needed to be based on race," he said. "We have an historical obligation to do so."

As far as the debate around foreign ownership of land was concerned, Nkwinti said this, for the time being, mainly related to SA's 82m hectares of agricultural land, of which about 1% was owned by foreigners.

"So when we talk about land owned by foreign nationals, we're talking about agricultural land," he said.

Nkwinti said the newly established Land Commission would deal with all land use and ownership, including land owned by foreigners. He said the government had explained its policy on foreign ownership to the German government and representatives of the European Union "and they understood it".

The minister said the government would also explain its land policy to ambassadors of all other countries.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge

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