

Farmers' representatives threatened

Farmer representatives were threatened while in wage dispute talks for De Doorns grape harvesters employer body Agri-Wes Cape said.

"They were busy with discussions and left for a break. Something must have happened during the break, because when union representatives came back, they made threats," said spokesman Porchia Adams.

She said the representatives' lives and safety were threatened.

The threats had been reported to police and it was expected that a case would be opened.

"We take this in a very serious light," Adams said.

Despite the threats, representatives decided to return to the talks in the interests of finding a solution, she said.

Workers have gathered on the N1 since Monday last week demanding R150 a day in wages along with improved living conditions, electricity, and an end to illegal evictions, illegal immigrant workers, and labour brokers.

Last week, protests resulted in vineyards being burnt, a number of arrests, and the closure of the N1 between Touws River and De Doorns.

Wouter Kriel, spokesman for agriculture MEC Gerrit van Rensburg, said many of the workers wanted to return to their jobs, but feared for their own safety and that of their families.

Talks with workers are being chaired by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration at the Worcester civic centre.

Farmers' representatives, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), the Black Association of the Wine and Spirit Industry, and the *Hex Rivier Plaaswerkers' Belange Groep* (Hex River Farmworkers' Interest Group) were party to the talks.

Agri-Wes Cape chief executive Carl Opperman asked workers to return to farms directly engage with their employers on any labour issues.

"It is of the utmost importance that the good relations between workers and producers continue in the Hex Rivr Valley as before."

Meanwhile, Cosatu says it continues to support the workers' demand of R150 per day and rejects the R80 offered by the farmers as an insult and return to slave wages.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge.

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