

Loss of commercial farmers hurts SA

It is "worrisome" that South Africa is losing many of its commercial farmers to countries to the north of it, academic and businesswoman Mamphela Ramphele said on Sunday (24 March).



Speaking at the opening of the *Land Divided 2013* conference at the University of Cape Town, she said the country was poorer for this.

"Fifteen years ago, there were 100,000 commercial farmers in South Africa, today, there were 36,000," she said.

"It is worrisome that South Africa is losing its commercial farmers to other countries. We are told that 50% of commercial farmers in Zambia are South Africans. There are 800 of them in Mozambique," she said.

Ramphele said commercial farmers were needed to nurture and support the emergence of small farmers in South Africa.

The four-day conference is being held 100 years after the passing of the segregationist 1913 Natives Land Act, which regulated and restricted black people from acquiring and owning land in South Africa.

The conference organisers - the universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Western Cape - say it offers "a major opportunity for researchers, civil society and the state to reflect on the significance of the land question' in South African society.

Ramphele said that 19 years into democracy, the land question continued to hold "historical, emotional and symbolic significance" in South Africa."

It also embodied a "history of lost opportunity", which could have been used to enhance the country's economic growth.

"If we were really to take a creative approach to land reform, we would be growing [economically] in double digits," she said.

Ramphela said inequality in South Africa was structurally created, and therefore "needs structural remedies".

She also criticised what she said was "the African National Congress's entrenchment of tribal authority".

"We need to address structural economic inequalities engendered by the [1913 Native] Land Act, and ensure that rural people are rights-bearing citizens, rather than subjects under the customary authority of chiefs," she said.

"The ANC government continues to entrench the autocratic rule and role of chiefs [over land], thereby marginalising ordinary people. I can't believe it's being done by our own post-apartheid government," Ramphela said.

She told her audience that the willing-buyer, willing-seller model of transferring land to black ownership had not worked.

"It does not take sufficient account of the structural pressures [that exist]," she added.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge

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