

Peace policy devised by farm workers

Striking farm workers will march in De Doorns next week to hand over a "peaceful strike policy", the Food and Allied Workers' Union (Fawu) said.

By Jenna Etheridge 19 Jan 2013



"There has been confusion among shop stewards. But this march will take place on 24 January (next Thursday) to the De Doorns police station," Western Cape organiser Sandile Keni said.

"This memorandum calls for both workers and police to stop the violence. One of the reasons is because the shooting [of rubber bullets] by police." The strike, which started last year, was suspended in December but resumed last more than a week ago in various towns in the province.

The Congress of SA Trade Unions (Cosatu) announced a week-long suspension of the strike on Tuesday (18 January), on condition that Agri SA honour commitments to "local-level" agreements and agree to stop alleged victimisation of workers.

Cosatu's Western Cape secretary Tony Ehrenreich said the suspension excluded De Doorns, because workers there were standing by their demands and were not open to negotiations.

Agri SA has repeatedly called for individual farmers to negotiate with their workers at farm level, which is apparently taking place.

Keni said they were planning to meet with a farmer in De Doorns on Friday afternoon (18 January), who had approached them and asked to hold a meeting.

"We believe we'll be having an offer and we appreciate that," Keni said.

A mass meeting would then be held in De Doorns on Sunday (20 January).

The Transvaal Agriculture Union (Tau-SA) said it feared the strike, which had been violent at times, would result in increased violent crime on farms.

"Unfounded accusations blaming farmers [for] exploiting their employees, illegal evictions, or the accusation that farmers have stolen the land to which they [employees] hold title deeds, creates a perception that farmers are criminals who need to be shown no mercy," said Tau-SA deputy president Henry Geldenhuys.

"This is reflected in the extreme cruelty which characterises farm attacks. Farmers need to ensure that the security arrangements are in place," he said.

Geldenhuys said farmers had no choice but to accept responsibility for their own safety, stating that three people had been killed in nine farm attacks this year.

On Monday (14 January), spaza shop worker Letsekang Thokoene, 25, died when he was allegedly shot with rubber bullets in De Doorns.

The same day, a 10-year-old girl was apparently shot in the eye with a rubber bullet.

The SA Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) on Thursday (17 January) said it was investigating over 20 complaints of brutality against farm workers by police, farmers, and private security.

Independent Police Investigative Directorate (Ipid) spokesman Moses Dlamini said he had received from the SAHRC numerous reports of cases involving police, mostly of assault and the use of rubber bullets at close range.

The labour department is holding an extra week of public hearings in the province to assist in the determination of a new minimum wage for the sector.

Hearings have already taken place in Grabouw, Paarl, De Doorns, and Robertson, with the last two to be held in Oudtshoorn and Vredendal.

Department spokesman Mokgadi Pela said an announcement on the new minimum wage determination was expected next month, with effect from March.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge