

BIG CHANGES IN STORE FOR LAND REFORM?

The Land Summit closed early yesterday having adopted a wide range of resolutions that will, if implemented, create a dramatically different and improved land reform programme in South Africa.

At the end of four days of hard talking the Land Summit unanimously (apart from objections from AgriSA) adopted a wide range of resolutions that civil society organisations have been calling for, including:

- the rejection of the willing-buyer willing-seller principle as the basis for land reform;
- the proactive acquisition of land that is required using expropriation when necessary;
- a moratorium on the eviction of farm dwellers;
- the insertion of a “social obligations clause” in the Constitution to protect those who occupy underutilised land;
- a needs-based people-centred approach to land needs identification and land acquisition; and
- the need for a pro-active role for the state in driving land reform and providing the other support services that will enable people to succeed on the land.

If implemented these and the other resolutions of the summit will certainly put land reform onto a “new trajectory”, just as the summit aimed to do. There are likely to be people with concerns, not least land owners, about this “new trajectory”; we hope they realise that dealing decisively with land issues now is essential for long term growth and stability in South Africa. At the same time reforms have to be done in a way that avoids chaos and disruption to the economy. As Minister Didiza emphasised in her closing address to the summit: we are between the devil and the deep blue sea. Despite the risks we also know that a far reaching land reform can make a significant contribution to true reconciliation in South Africa, development and improved livelihoods for the poor: we all have a responsibility to make it succeed.

Unfortunately the way the summit was run did not allow for detailed discussion on how to give effect to the resolutions; the effective translation of the resolutions into programmes remains a challenge. This is a challenge that we welcome the opportunity to assist in meeting.

We call on government to ensure an inclusive and transparent process for taking the resolutions forward and hope that in this process the government will not talk about the resolutions as recommendations of the summit as if they were not part of it. The government, represented by a large number of officials and politicians from the most senior positions, organised the summit, ran the process and participated actively in the discussions. No one from the government raised any objection to the resolutions adopted; we therefore look forward to working with them to ensure prompt and dynamic implementation of all the resolutions.

Issued by the Alliance of Land and Agrarian Reform Movements (ALARM).

A network of more than twenty organisation involved with land reform

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