

South Africa farm seizures 'could become next ZIMBABWE', warns expert

Paul Withers

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Tensions among South Africa's white farming community are threatening to reach breaking point, particularly since the election of Cyril Ramaphosa earlier this year.

On July 31, President Cyril Ramaphosa, who had only been elected into office in February, confirmed his African National Congress (ANC) party would pass an amendment to the country's constitution to allow the seizure of white-owned farmland without compensation.

Mr Ramaphosa claimed the new amendment was designed to "outline more clearly the conditions under which expropriation of land without compensation can be affected".

Last week, ANC chairman Gwede Mantashe sparked panic among the farming community when he said that any farmers owning more than 25,000 acres of land would have it taken from them without compensation.

The South African government has now started seizing land from white farmers, initially targeting two game farmers in the northern province of Limpopo after talks with the owners Akkerland Boerdery broke down over a huge differences in its estimated value.

They had wanted 200m rand (£16.7m) for the land, but the government were only willing to offer them just a tenth of that at 20m rand (£1.67m).

Alexander C. R. Hammond is a researcher at HumanProgress.org, a project by US libertarian think tank The Cato Institute, and raged that South Africa is in danger of going down the same path as Zimbabwe did in 2000.

Then-dictator Robert Mugabe began chaotic land seizures of 23m acres from white owned farms that led to riots, the killings of farmers, famine and economic collapse, which saw the daily inflation rate average hit 98 percent at its peak in 2008 and cost the crisis-hit country \$20bn.

Writing for US international affairs magazine The National Interest, Mr

Hammond said: "South Africa is beginning to head down the same path toward social and economic disaster that its northern neighbour Zimbabwe took eighteen years ago.

“Violence became common as five white farm owners and dozens more black farm workers were killed.

“Then, food shortages devastated the Zimbabwean people as food production in the nation that was once dubbed the ‘breadbasket’ of Africa, fell 60 percent within ten years.

“And finally, the economy was ruined as the land grab induced hyperinflation that peaked in 2008.

“In 2009, the Zimbabwean economist Eddie Cross estimated that legalising seizures of white farmland with no compensation cost Zimbabwe more than \$20bn.”

Mr Hammond argued that the danger signs are already there, with reports from the South African Police and the Transvaal Agricultural Union - a group representing the interests of white farmers - revealing an increase in the number of attacks on white farmers.

Between January and March 2019, there were 109 attacks and 15 murders on white farms, averaging one death every five days, with Mr Hammond arguing that President Ramaphosa’s amendment will inevitably lead to increased violence as land seizures become commonplace.

He added that taking land away from “productive and knowledgeable farmers” and handing it to those unfamiliar with the industry will lead to a slump in productivity.

Mr Hammond claimed that some experts are predicting that South Africa could already be heading towards hyperinflation - just as Zimbabwe did a decade ago.

South Africa’s unemployment rate is at a 15-year high of 27.2 percent and will likely deteriorate further as workers on expropriated farms become unemployed.

Mr Hammond continued: “Ramaphosa promised that expropriating white farmlands without compensation will turn South Africa into “ the garden of Eden”.

“In reality, this amendment will mean the Rainbow Nation faces increasing violence, a decline in productivity, and further economic degradation.

“Unable to boost a struggling economy, the ANC will continue pushing populist policies to bolster their popularity before the next election.

“They see sacrificing the rights of white farmers as a price worth paying for another term in office and, if the majority of South Africans willingly accept this sacrifice, the brutal consequences will come hard and fast.”