



## agriculture & rural development

Department:  
Agriculture and Rural Development  
**PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

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Disgruntled members of Kranskop community blocked off the R74 in a protest against a local farmer whom they said was planning to clear their family graves and plant mielies. The angry community members set alight farm land. **PHOTO: SABELO NSELE**

### **NOMPILO KUNENE, SABELO NSELE and CHELSEA PIETERSE**

THE Kranskop and Greytown farming community came under fire from Monday night after the graves of community members in the area were allegedly dug up on a farm.

The incident — which a source told *The Witness* was believed to have happened “accidentally” — sparked outrage and resulted in community members setting fire to a number of plantations and farmland in the district from Monday night.

The burning continued yesterday.

*The Witness* was also told that a manager’s house on the property of farmer Carl Gathmann was petrol bombed, but the farmer yesterday declined to speak to *Witness* journalists at the scene and said he will issue a statement today.

Yesterday morning the main provincial road, the R74 between Kranskop and Greytown, was barricaded with burning logs and broken bottles by an angry crowd of about 300 protesters, bringing traffic to a standstill. The SAPS Public Order Policing unit cleared the road and Road Traffic Inspectorate officers monitored the situation yesterday.

Sikhumbuzo Zondi, a community

member, told *The Witness* that they were angry because the farmer, Gathmann, had “graded their relatives’ graves”.

“First he forcefully removed the people from his farm — people who were born and grew up on the farms. He gave them R2 000 to move and the lives of those who refused to move were threatened and they were told that if they don’t move they won’t get development such as running water and electricity,” he alleged.

Zondi said the community has been

roaming on his land and charged the owners R200 to get it back. “I was forced to sell off my 17 sheep, of which 12 were pregnant,” he said.

Ncamsile Buthelezi alleged she was “forcefully removed” from the farm and that her family home was demolished. She expressed outrage that her parents’ and siblings’ graves were graded.

Local chief Zakhele Sithole led a delegation that met with Gathmann yesterday at around noon. Sithole said they had agreed to meet again next

A member of a security company present at the start of the chaos on Monday night, who asked not to be named, said people started setting fires to plantations in the area. “They started fires in the plantations and when the farmers went to try put the fire out, the community started throwing stones at them.

“A farmer’s son was hit by a brick during the incident. There were about 10 to 15 fires. As soon as the one fire had been put out, another one had already started,” he said.

graves without knowing. He did not even see them,” he said.

Kranskop Farming Association chairperson Rolf Konigkramer said he and other farmers battled fires believed to have been started by the disgruntled community members from Monday night onwards.

Konigkramer said a farmer’s house was raided by community members yesterday, but said he could not confirm the petrol bombing incident as he knew nothing about it.

He added that the farmers would continue patrolling the area to ensure no plantation fires were left burning.

Provincial police spokesperson Colonel Thembeke Mbele said the protest action had started at about 3 am yesterday. “About 300 protesters have blocked the road complaining about a farmer who has graded the cemetery of Aussicht farm. The road is closed as bottles were broken and placed on the road,” she said in a statement.

Mbele said the Public Order Police Unit, Road Traffic Inspectorate and Greytown police members were at the scene monitoring the situation and clearing the road. She said no injuries or damage were reported. Asked later about the petrol bombing incident, she said the only report the police received was damage to a gate and guard house of one of the farm houses.

## “They started fires in the plantations and when the farmers went to try put the fire out, the community started throwing stones at them.”

trying to get the government and police to intervene since 2016 but their pleas had fallen on deaf ears.

Another community member, who asked not to be named in the newspaper, said they would continue with protest action until the matter was resolved. They claimed Gathmann was “bullying” community members and alleged he was friends with the local police station commander.

Another grievance was that the farmer confiscated livestock found

week and are expecting Agriculture and Rural Development MEC Themba Mthembu to be present.

“That’s D-Day. We want to leave that meeting with some sort of finality. If there are some hindrances, we should be told what those hindrances are so that we can be able to deal with them ourselves. They have been driving us for a long time and now is the time for us to start driving them,” said Sithole.

The people dispersed after being addressed by Sithole.

He said the security company was called in to assist and guards were also hit by rocks.

He said they managed to disperse the crowd on Monday night but the protesters started rallying again yesterday morning.

The source told *The Witness* the incident appeared to have been sparked by allegations that graves were dug up.

“It was actually a farm labourer driving a TLB. He was driving in an overgrown bushy area and drove over the