



# 'Not about the graves'

## Farmer says burial site issue being used to cover bid to get him off his farm

**NOMPILO KUNENE**

THE Kranskop farmer accused of digging up graves on his farm believes the real intention of this week's protests had "nothing to do with graves" and everything to do with dispossessing him of his property.

The farmer, Carl Gathmann, issued a written statement yesterday in the wake of Tuesday's protest action during which he said his farm manager's home (on Potspruit farm) was "petrol bombed repeatedly and 30-odd fires were set throughout the property". Rocks were also thrown and roads were blocked.

Gathmann said these events were violent and intolerable.

Gathmann said it was clear to him that the issue of gravesites had been "misrepresented by political opportunists" in a concerted effort to vilify him and his family business. "I hope this comes to an end immediately," he said.

He said he found the incidents highly disturbing. "I think it's important for all people to respect one another's sacred beliefs and sites of interment. I have consistently made efforts on my farm to deal with the remains of the dead with respect and care and also to treat the living with utmost dignity," he said in the statement.

Gathmann said the intention of Monday and Tuesday's events was clearly to harm him, his family and employees and to intimidate them.



Fuming Kranskop resident Ncamsile Buthelezi tells of how farmer Carl Gathmann demolished her house when he allegedly kicked her off his farm. **PHOTO: SABELO NSELE**

"As far as I can tell, the contention has nothing to do with graves and everything to do with effecting the dis-possession of our property," he said.

Gathmann disputed having intentionally dug up the graves. "I wish that the media in particular, and South Africans in general would not be so quick to jump to the conclusion that I as a commercial farmer am so disrespectful of others that I would intentionally desecrate their graves, and so stupidly imprudent that I could think I would do such a thing and get away with it," he said.

"The thought of desecrating people's graves intentionally would not cross my mind, as a matter of principle, but even if you're not prepared

to grant the benefit of the doubt on that front, consider how any reasonable person would refrain from such actions," said Gathmann.

He said on the contrary, he has helped provide the community with drinking water for the past two and a half years, said he helps his workers wherever he can and said he has a stable workforce with whom he has an "excellent working relationship".

Ncamsile Buthelezi (60), who alleges she was forcibly removed from the farm, said the dispute between community members and Gathmann started in the early 2000s when Gathmann's father, whom the community referred to as "Mehlemamba", was still in charge.

**"I approached Carl's father, Mehlemamba, and asked that he allow me to build my own house next to my family home and he agreed. While I was building, Carl came with security guards and pointed guns at me, I was removed off the property, arrested and my house was destroyed."  
— Ncamsile Buthelezi**

"Because the farmworkers didn't earn much, Mehlemamba used to give us vegetables to sell and eat. At some stage the farmworkers got fed up and started protesting against unfair wages. Carl's father then called Carl, who we believe was serving in the military, to take over the farm. From there everything went downhill," she said.

She said Gathmann started "forcefully" removing people from his farm in 2016 to be able to use the land to plant mealies and paid them R2 000 to move. She said he promised to find better land for them but that never happened. Buthelezi says she was kicked off the farm in 2010 and that Gathmann had laid land invasion charges against her.

"I was born on the farm and started working for Carl's father when I was only 12 years old. I worked on the farm for 40 years and when I fell sick my

eldest son started working at the farm. When my parents and some of my siblings died we buried them on the farm.

"I approached Carl's father, Mehlemamba, and asked that he allow me to build my own house next to my family home and he agreed. While I was building, Carl came with security guards and pointed guns at me, I was removed off the property, arrested and my house was destroyed," said Buthelezi.

She said she wanted Gathmann to leave the area as he has "abused the community too much".

Sandile Maharaj told *The Witness* that his family, along with at least three other families, were still residing on the farm despite Gathmann having already "chased away" about 15 families since 2016.

"My family is also planning on moving out of the farm but we are

struggling to find a proper plot of land to rebuild our family home in the area. The only land available is near the wetland and we have fears that if we build there our house might be swept away by heavy rains."

Maharaj said Gathmann wanted no electricity poles or lines to be erected on his property and also prohibited people from digging long-drop toilets.

He added that the community was "fed-up".

"There was also a land claim that was submitted for that farm a few years ago and it's strange that to this day nothing has ever come out of it," he said.

Approached by *The Witness* for his response to the various allegations, Gathmann said he was aware of them and they are "totally devoid of any truth".

He said he has not evicted even one person. He said anyone who left did so of their own free will.

According to Gathmann, the "exodus" had started after one person came to him and asked for help to buy a plot at a neighbouring location for R2 500. He had agreed to help, and also offered the man a water tanker and to help move his goods.

"Every single allegation is an absolute lie," the farmer said.

Kranskop Farming Association chairperson Rolf Konigkramer and the police said the area was calm yesterday.

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