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'This is about land'

Kranskop farmer says ongoing dispute is not about alleged atrocities

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THE Kranskop farmer alleged to have disturbed the graves of community members has asked police to conduct forensic investigations to help clear his name.

Carl Gathmann again yesterday reiterated his earlier denial that he had dug up any graves on his farm, as he was accused of doing by protesters who last week blocked the R74 and set fire to multiple plantations in the area.

He also revealed in a telephonic interview yesterday that he'd yesterday received documents for the first time relating to a land claim on his farm, even though he had been aware previ-

ously there was a claim.

Responding to the community's call on Wednesday for Gathmann and "other white farmers" to leave the area, Gathmann said this confirms what he had said from the outset.

"This is a confirmation of what I had said when this whole affair started. This has nothing to do with all the atrocities that have supposedly been committed, it is about land property rights and farm land, that is what they want," he said.

Gathmann said he was happy with the government's interventions so far.

"Yesterday [on Wednesday] I had a meeting with the acting provincial police commissioner Major-General

Bheki Langa and asked that forensic investigations be conducted about these allegations on the graves... I don't know if it [the outcome of an investigation] will change any perceptions as we all know that the main issue here is land," he said.

Gathmann said he had heard that the community had submitted a land claim for his farm but had only received the actual documentation yesterday.

"It's not just for my farm. It is actually a land claim for 9 000 hectares of land in this area. I still need to get legal advice on the matter," he said.

He said his family have owned the Potspruit Farm for almost 60 years and that the graves of his late family mem-

bers are also on the farm.

According to Gathmann, in 2011 he had purchased some land in eSgedlane, Kranskop, where he had planned to build a "town" for the community.

"I was going to build roads and a crèche. I had arranged with the Umzinyathi District Municipality to have RDP houses built. We had been in touch with the Agriculture Department to help people attain agricultural skills. They were going to get plots — 40x40 metres squared each — but a certain community member who feared that he would lose his people, put a spanner in the works and basically derailed that whole idea," said Gathmann.

He added that at the moment the

situation was calm and under control. "We haven't really seen any threat at the moment but we know that any thing can transpire in a very short time span," he added.

The violent protests in the area have attracted the attention of provincial government and the MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development has held talks with the community and with Gathmann. On Wednesday, he addressed a meeting in the Kranskop area where community members demanded that Gathmann and other white farmers leave the area. The MEC said he would be in touch with all roleplayers and would report back in due course.

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