



agriculture & rural development

Department:
Agriculture and Rural Development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

21 July 2018

Weekend Witness

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Emotions run high ahead of land hearings at city hall

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EMOTIONS ran high at the Pietermaritzburg City Hall during yesterday's public hearings on land expropriation, with a white farmer leaving the venue in a huff amid threats of violence.

The farmer, who only introduced himself as Visser, irked many when he told members of the Joint Constitutional Review Committee conducting the hearings that it was pointless to give black people land.

He said the black population knew nothing about farming.

Speaking in Afrikaans, Visser, who on his way out showed the heckling and booing crowd a middle finger, said he would only give up his land over his dead body.

This after Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) Pietermaritzburg Ezinketheni branch secretary Sphamandla Ndlovu had told members of the committee that the party has already started grabbing and taking over "stolen land".

"As we speak members of the EFF have already taken over land at Bakersville Heights along Greytown road. We are currently moving to other areas as we intensify our campaign to return land to its original owners," he

said.

The Pietermaritzburg hearings were part of the committee's nationwide public consultations to establish whether the country's citizens supported the proposal that section 25 of the Constitution should be amended to allow expropriation without compensation.

A large crowd had turned up for the hearings, resulting in hundreds of people not being able to enter as the city hall was already packed by noon.

Supporters of political parties sang and shouted the slogans of their respective organisations outside the venue, with EFF backers singing the praises of their leader, Julius Malema.



Supporters of different parties are barred from entry to the Pietermaritzburg City Hall to listen to the land debate.

PHOTO: NHLANHLA NKOSI

IFP supporters, whose leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi is the architect of the Ingonyama Trust currently under attack for denying rural dwellers land rights, toyi-toyed outside the venue, calling on the ANC government to "take their hands off" the Ingonyama Trust.

However, a Khoi-San representative told the crowd to refrain from fighting over land that "did not belong to them".

"We are the original owners of the entire land in this country, everyone else found us here," he said.

The KwaZulu-Natal leg of the hearings began in Vryheid on Wednesday before moving to Jozini and Pietermaritzburg on Thursday and yesterday respectively. The committee, which has already received more than 700 000 written submissions on the land matter, will conclude its KZN leg of hearings in Kokstad today.

So far, people who had been participating in the public hearings across the country's nine provinces have overwhelmingly supported the proposal to amend section 25 of the Constitution to allow for the expropriation of land without compensation.

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