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NAMIBIA NATIONAL FRONT (NNF)

SUBMISSION OF THE NNF TO THE CONFERENCE
ON LAND REFORM AND THE LAND QUESTION

25 JUNE - 1 JULY, 1991
WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

"GIVE THE LAND BACK TO THE PEOPLE!"

1. INTRODUCTION:

Right Hon. Prime Minister,
Honourable Ministers,
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,
Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished invited guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Fellow Namibians!

1.1 Allow me, first of all, to apologise for the unavoidable absence of the President of the NNF [Adv. Vekuli Rukoro] who, due to official commitments is presently overseas. Secondly, on behalf of the NNF delegation to this historic Conference on Land Reform and the Land Question, I wish to express a word of thanks to all the Political Parties represented in the National Assembly for having offered the masses of this country this opportunity to have their voices heard on an issue of paramount national significance. We also wish to salute the Government of the Republic, and in particular the Right Hon. Prime Minister, for having put in tremendous effort to ensure that this national consultative platform becomes a reality. Last but not the least, a special word of thanks and appreciation to the members of the Secretariat, the Advisory Committee, the expert researchers and especially NEPRU, for the incredible amount of invaluable research that they have produced, and which enables us today to conduct a meaningful and informed consultation.

1.2 Mr. Chairman, Ladies and gentlemen, you will recall that my Party fought the 1989 independence elections with the central theme of "GIVE THE LAND BACK TO THE PEOPLE!" That was a profound political message, the historical validity of which has come back to hound us

genocide or ethnocide aimed at the Herero people, resulted in the massacre of about 67% (i.e. more than 80.000) of the Hereros and about 50% (i.e. more than 20.000) of the Namas. These massacres facilitated the further confiscation of massive tracts of land covering Central and Eastern Namibia including over 60.000 herd of cattle belonging to the Hereros and Namas. Having dispossessed our people of their land and cattle, the colonialists proceeded to turn our ancestors into slave labourers on the confiscated land for the development of settler economic infrastructures.

3. Soon thereafter, the Namibian people entered a second phase of colonial occupation and enslavement when the troops of the Union of South Africa defeated the Germans in May 1915 and proceeded to occupy Namibia in turn. Four years later at the Versailles Conference of 1919 Namibia was, once again, "given" to South Africa. South Africa promptly inherited and continued to perfect the fascist measures of the German regime through the creation of the "native reserves" system, in terms of which our people were forcefully relocated from their fertile lands into the new tribal Trust lands. The latter had marginal agricultural capacity and our people became refugees in their own country. Others were forced into exile in neighbouring Botswana where their off-springs continue to live in exile.

4. In the meantime, white settler farmers from South Africa poured into Namibia in their thousands to occupy the prime grazing lands on the Central Plateau of Namibia. By the end of the 1950's, all commercially viable land was in settler hands to serve a whites-only colonial economy at the expense of the rightful owners

of Namibia. The vast majority of ranchers have since remained Afrikaners and the rest were German nationals who remained in Namibia after the 1915 defeat. Other immigrants from imperial Germany followed suit to share in the land of honey. Since independence in 1990 they and their off-springs have become citizens of Namibia and are considered to be the "rightful" owners of the lands confiscated from our people. In contrast, the off-springs of the victims of German barbarism continue to be in exile in Botswana with no uncontested prospects to Namibian citizenship whilst their brothers and sisters continue to live in the native reserves of yesterday.

2.5 Mr. Chairman, this is the historical context within which any serious and meaningful discussion of the Land Issue must take place. These are the historical developments which brought us under this roof today. I assure you that the evidence of this historical process can be derived from Namibia's geographical names as well as the graves of our ancestors and heroes which today can still be found on some of the so-called private properties of some of our country-men and women. This is the background against which the economic dimensions of the policy of national reconciliation and the rights to private property are to be addressed.

2.6 The crux of the problem today is the continued suffering and deprivation of the majority of our citizens as a result of the historical unlawful dispossession and land theft by colonial occupiers. The crux of the problem today is the socio-economic effect of the aforesaid dispossession in terms of the resultant consequences of overcrowdedness and overgrazing in the communal

should be made in the law for expropriation of such land subject to the stipulations of the Namibian Constitution relating to the public interest and the payment of just compensation. The land so acquired by Government is to be sub-divided (in appropriate cases) and re-allocated by way of sale or otherwise to various categories of persons, for example:

- 3.2.1 Wealthy communal farmers who must be encouraged to move out of the communal areas by buying commercial farms. Obviously, they will expect Government to design appropriate financial and training programmes to ensure that this category of farmers become and remain successful. Therefore, subsidized loans in the form of low interest rates and low deposit requirements should be considered.
- 3.2.2 Groups of Families each to be provided with a Family Unit that is large enough to support a modest but economically viable farming undertaking. The exact size of such a unit must necessarily depend on many factors, e.g. the carrying capacity of the area concerned. It is expected that this type of land reform will result in drastic land use and land tenure as it will transform substantial numbers of subsistence farmers into commercial farmers.
- 3.2.3 Industrial peasant farmers from communal areas who wish to embark on small-scale commercial farming. For this purpose, fenced camps in the farms purchased by Government are to be allotted to such individual peasant farmers.

3.5 If commercial farmers are not willing to voluntarily offer their excess land for sale, we propose that before the Government exercises its prerogative to expropriate as aforesaid, various other economic instruments which are likely to result in a voluntary surrender of such excess land, are to be invoked. An example is the introduction of a progressive tax on land which is likely to make the ownership of excessive land an extremely unprofitable proposition - therefore resulting in such land being put onto the market where Government shall have the first option to buy. According to the findings of preliminary research available to us, such a land tax combined with higher interest rates on credit for certain categories of landholdings, is likely to result in 20% of existing commercial holdings being released to the market. In addition, such economic instruments will encourage the proper utilization of land by avoiding the purchase and/or ownership of land for the sake of prestige or for speculative purposes. The general principle, therefore, is that land should be used to its maximum economic potential and in pursuit of that objective only those people who can till the land properly and efficiently must be put on it.

3.6 Furthermore, to ensure that adequate land becomes available for purposes of redistribution the following measures are proposed:

3.6.1 Absentee landlords - whether foreign or national, must be prohibited for at least a specified period of time. However, an exemption might be considered in the case of nationals if the absentee owner can prove that adequate management has been provided and that the land is not being under-utilized.

- 3.6.2 Foreigners should be prohibited by law from owning agricultural or farming land in Namibia. Those who have already acquired such land are to offer the same for sale to the State within a specified period of time. However, in appropriate cases where the public interest so demands, the granting of a long-term lease should be considered.
- 3.6.3 Finally, for as long as the Nation is faced by this severe hunger for land on the part of the majority of our citizens, consideration should be given to limiting the number and/or size of farms per person or company. In this regard, the NNF proposes that, in principle, a person or company should not own more than two (2) farms, except in cases where, in the public interest, the law provides for carefully considered exemptions. The actual size of a farm shall be dependent on the agro-ecological condition of the region concerned as well as the type of farming contemplated.
- 3.7 With regard to the second land reform strategy (3.1.2.), namely, that of the planned development of communal areas we wish to emphasize the absolute necessity of improving the farming methods of communal farmers so as to achieve increased productivity and income. This strategy is of vital importance if we agree with John Marshall that communal land is "the poor man's farm", and that communal farming is here to stay for generations to come.

- 3.8 It is imperative to understand that the development of communal lands should be undertaken for the explicit purpose of communal - and not private use! Traditional farming systems in communal areas aim at self-sufficiency and the provision of welfare support. In addition, to some people traditional farming in communal areas is a way of life - part of their cultural heritage which they intend to keep - and rightly so. Therefore, the economic future of a great majority of rural people will continue to be in the communal areas.
- 3.9 Further, given the overcrowdedness in communal areas there is a need for the extension of communal grazing area through the purchase of adjacent commercial farms by the government.
- 3.10 In addition, we would propose that a substantial part of the 15% state land be turned into emergency or alternative grazing farms available to communal and small-scale commercial farmers by way of drought relief. This form of drought relief will ensure that the benefits of the temporary resettlement extend to a larger number of stock owners while at the same time the communal areas concerned are enabled to regenerate. To ensure that farmers do move back once grazing in communal areas has recovered, a legally binding agreement should be entered into so that defaulters can be evicted without delay, and perhaps even denied further participation in the scheme in future. This emergency grazing facility should not be available to established commercial farmers.

- 3.11 The NNF further proposes that currently unutilized large tracts of land in communal areas be developed through the provision of boreholes, water pipelines, fencing, roads, earth dams and other physical infrastructure. Once developed, such land can either continue to be used communally or be re-allocated to individual family holdings for commercial farming purposes by ex-subsistence farmers. Needless to say, in certain areas where livestock expansion is hampered by national factors (poisonous plants), due consideration must be given to devise alternative utilization of such areas.
- 3.12 The NNF also proposes that serious consideration be given to limiting stock numbers per person or family household in communal areas for a specified period of time. This limitation should remain in force until the new land reform programme's impact can be assessed after expiry of the aforesaid period of time. This measure is absolutely necessary to prevent the space created by the departure of the larger and wealthier communal farmers to commercial areas, being filled and overcrowded in a few years due to the uncontrolled expansion of the herds of the small farmers left behind. The exact figures of the proposed limitation shall depend on the agro-ecological condition of the area concerned.
- 3.13 The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development must secure access to markets for the products (crops and livestock) of communal farmers on a sustainable basis, so that our rural people are assured of cash returns.

3.14 As far as the illegal fencing of large areas of communal grazing by wealthy farmers is concerned, a practice which deprives the majority of small and poor farmers of access to such grazing, the NNF is of the opinion that urgent steps must be taken without delay to check and reverse this illegal practice. The privatization of otherwise communal grazing land is totally inadmissible, and no legal recognition whatsoever of title to such enclosed land is to be accorded by the state. On the contrary, Government should take steps to return such grazing land to communal use.

3.15 Wealthy communal farmers and others who opt for resettlement on commercial farming land in terms of the scheme proposed herein, are to forfeit all rights in communal areas in that they should be required to remove all their stock from communal areas. They are not to be permitted to exercise dual grazing rights.

4. GENERAL AND CONCLUDING REMARKS:

Mr. Chairman, distinguished participants,

4.1 Our specific and detailed proposals which some of you may consider too radical, are predicated on the compelling necessity to restore historical land rights as well as our principled position that every Namibian has a basic fundamental right to farm meaningfully - whether on private or communal land. The enjoyment of this right has been denied for too long to many Namibians.

- 4.2 Furthermore, heavy emphasis has been placed on the need to bring about significant development of communal areas. This is because of the fact that although communal land comprises only 25% of all land in Namibia, some 70% of Black Namibians live on it by engaging in subsistence farming. It is also providing employment to some 300.000 people - a figure that represents more than half the economically active population of Namibia.
- 4.3 We are of the opinion that those who benefit from the Land Reform programme as finally adopted by Government, must be provided with adequate training to enable them to acquire relevant farming and management skills. Indeed, such skills should be a pre-requisite for obtaining a loan for farming purposes. The Ministry of Agriculture Water and Rural Development should also step up its extension services on a continuous basis.
- 4.4 It must be noted that the provision of credit to farmers in communal areas has become imperative if at all growth in such areas is to be effected and sustained. In view of the fact that communal farmers do not have private land to offer as collateral, a special rural credit scheme should be worked out to extend credit facilities to communal farmers. Special terms must be considered, e.g. a state agency charged with the provision of such credit should be empowered to accept cattle as collateral for a loan. Similarly, cattle should be accepted as part-payment in kind for the purchase of farms from the Government. Some of the 15% State farms can be used for the purposes of temporary grazing of such cattle prior to slaughtering them for the lucrative EEC and other markets.

- 4.5 It is hightime our communal farmers realize that Government's function is to help people to help themselves. Therefore, they must accept co-responsibility for their own development. In this regard, we propose that a special tax in the form of "grazing fees" be payable by all communal farms to enable Government to render the necessary services associated with the development of their areas.
- 4.6 Finally, the basic principle being that only those capable and willing to till the land must be put on the land. Government must appoint an Independent Commission on Land to monitor the acquisition, under-utilization of land as well as the incidence of absentee landlords.

Mr. Chairman, fellow Namibians, hundreds of thousands of Namibians have pinned their hopes on this historic Conference. Let us not fail them by not articulating their true aspirations and legitimate expectations. To the extent that the NNF's Statement represents a contribution in that regard we are happy and grateful to have been associated with this national consultation.

I thank you for your patience.

"GIVE THE LAND. BACK TO THE PEOPLE!"

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