

Vaalgras Rural Community

National Archives  
of Namibia

MEMORANDUM-VAALGRAS

LAND REFORM CONFERENCE

We the delegates of Vaalgras, representing the whole Vaalgras community under the leadership of chief Joël Stephanus, would like to use this opportunity to thank the Hon. Prime Minister and the government for organising this very important conference to address the so sensitive, important, but also urgent issue of land and land reform in Namibia.

We would also like to thank the Hon. Prime Minister sincerely for being invited and offered the opportunity to make our humble contribution to this end.

Conscious<sup>ly</sup> of the sensitivity of the issue at stake, but hoping that our opinions would contribute towards a good solution, and also help to keep track with the historical facts and realities of our country, as well as the traditional and ancestral values and heritage of our nation and different groups, we would like to express ourselves as follows:

We the Vaalgras people, better known as the "Oorlams" or Nama Speaking Hereros or Nama Daman" under the dynamic leadership of chief Joël Stephanus and his council, with the understanding that the whole struggle started by our ancestors and continued by ourselves until independence, was mainly and foremost to get back the land which was taken from the people and also to restore the traditional and historical status of landownership and usage by the people of Namibia, would like to categorize the land issue as follows:

There are four (4) categories of land to be dealt with:

- (1) Commercially owned land.
- (2) Communally owned land.
- (3) State Land.
- (4) Traditional land.

It is a fact that there were land or pieces of land which were traditionally owned by certain tribes or groups prior to colonial rule and even in the early stages of colonial rule. But that some parts of these land was taken from the people without any good and acceptable reasons or compensation. And that people in various areas therefore rightfully can claim these land back, now that the country is independent and that we are in the process of redressing the wrongs and injustices of the past. We therefore would like to approach and address the land question in two parts, (a) Communal and traditional land and (b) Commercial and State land .

Thus:

A. Communal and traditional land:

What is today owned and utilised as communal lands are very small portions of what was traditional land belonging to different tribes and groups. With out being tribalistic we beleive that the excistence of tribal groups and tribal and traditional leadership which no democracy or nationhood can wish away, is only a realistic and a fair reason for showing traditional land which will be administrated and runned accordingly.

- (i) We thus are claiming for the original beacons and boundaries of Vaalgras which will include the following farmes taken away from the people of Vaalgras, without any compensation or acceptable reason by the S.A. Government and presently commercially owned by white farmers: Sherley, Perdevlei, Barbarosa, Habep, Fanara, Grasheuwel, Hanichas, Finis, Middelplaas, Haakdoring and Karub. As these farms were originally parts of Vaalgras, we want them back as such for traditional heritage, adminiscration and usage ± 58 000 hectars for the ±1500-2000 people to live on and practice farming for a living.

(ii) We are also claiming the farms of the so called "Daberas Blok" which were allocated to the Vaalgras people with the introduction of the Odendaalplan in 1969, but were later proclaimed for the "Blue West people so-called". We are having two reasons for this claim.

(a) This land was originally linked to Vaalgras before the colonial era and was mainly the hunting area of our forefathers. It was later divided and fenced into commercial farms and sold to white farmers.

(b) It was allocated in 1969 to the Vaalgras people under the leadership of the late chief Samuel Stephanus with the introduction of the Odendaalplan after being bought back from the white farmers. Although our people are still on the farms, our chief's and his council's jurisdiction was withdrawn later because of political reasons. The main reason or cause being our refusal to participate in the than internal arrangements and set up by the S.A. Government which aimed at the opposing of our liberation struggle and the consequent delay of our freedom and independence. The utilization of these farms and other government services like water provision, were used to pressurise people to join the S.A. Government and its allies like the D.T.A. in their efforts to oppose the struggle lead by SWAPO and to mislead the international world at large. When we refused to join these efforts, our people and the leadership were denied the right of occupation and

jurisdiction as far as the as these farms are concerned: We maintenance either based on the aforementioned, that we, like all other people and groups have a rightfull claim on these farms allocated to us. This doesn't mean that we are supportive and acceptive to the Odendaalplan and the Bantustands as was planned and implemented. But if is merely because of the fact that farms were allocated to different tribes and groups and the others are still having their portions allocated to them as such. Why not us? Whilst we were also and are still having a burning need for more farming land for our people, who won't be able to acquire commercial land for farming purposes, even on hand of loans. Statistics and data about people and animals can prove this fact.

### B. Commercial and Stateland

#### (i) Commercial Land:

This category of land is the greatest part of our country and is owned by the smallest part of our population. It is about 60% of our country and is occupied by 4% of the population. As the history has to be kept on record and the injustices redressed, we would like the government to go back in history and find out about the coming of the whites and the ways and manners they acquired land in this country. We are of the opinion that historical facts as well as the ways according to which the original white owners got the farms, don't allow nor justify that farms in this

country can now be bought on high and expensive prices as are presently on the market, in order to avail the original land owners to be, of this country with at least a piece of land.

- (a) Many of these farms have simply been inherited from an owner who got it if not free of charge, on a very low price and a very soft loan.
- (b) Some are owned by foreigners who don't have any need of the farm nor a legal right to possess land and that at the expense of the people of the country.
- (c) Many farms have been over capitalised, and are now prized accordingly, only to exploit the country and the people for a last time.

Why should the Namibian government and the people of this country after liberating this country with their blood and lives, pay high and expensive prices for their own land to people who got the farms free or very cheap. It will be unfair.

(ii) Stateland:

This category of land can be seen as existing out of two types; (a) Reserves or Communal land and (b) Some commercial farms for research and production. The communal land is already over crowded, over grazed and thus no more potentially productive. Although there is certainly a need for research and production, we are of the opinion that there are too many of these

*(d) It also happened that areas known to be having mineral deposits had been either taken or bought by private individuals. These deposits were well within the communal areas, but in special circumstances the lands appropriate for mineral extraction in the north of Namibia. It has been suggested that these mineral lands should be reserved for the state.*

farms sometimes in one region. The services of these farms were also only to the disposal of certain people in the past. The majority of the people in the country did not benefit of these farms; and where at all than very little; so far them this still remains last land.

We thus would like to propose the following in addressing the land issue:

1. Germany, England and South Africa were the colonial Powers responsible for the coming of these today occupying the country. They are equally responsible for the returning of this land to its rightful owners, and the redressing of the past. They therefore must pay for the implementation of the process of redistribution of land in Namibia, as well as for any compensation to those who have to get rid of farms.
2. Farmers must only be compensated for developments done on the farms. The ground on the farm is not theirs, as they acquired it from the colonial regimes which were not representing the rightful owners of the land.
3. The farms if bought, must be bought on government prices in order to be sold to communal farmers on lower prices and soft loans.

4. The amount of land one has, must be evaluated with the number of animals he/she is having, so that all extra land in possession of a farmer must be availed to those who don't have land.
5. Depending on the carrying capacity of farms in given areas farmers must be taxed on second and third etc. farms and land.

Hoping that this little contribution of ours will be worthwhile we are once again thanking the government for addressing the land issue. We are looking forward for good results and a better future for all our people.

May God bless the work of your government and the whole Namibian nation.

I thank you.

*W. Konjone.*