

# New Land Affairs Minister sets priorities



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Derek Hanekom, former ANC Land Desk head and recently appointed Minister of Land Affairs, spoke to *AFRA News* a few days after his appointment. Here's what he had to say about his initial plans for land reform and the priorities for his ministry.

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*What current land legislation is likely to be retained and what scrapped?*

The Land Claims Court is the key and can be fast tracked. We have prepared a final draft of the legislation around the Land Claims Court process and this will be put to the August sitting of parliament.

Other key areas which we will be focusing on are strengthening tenure rights to allow various tenure forms to exist, for example

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the kinds of rights which labour tenants have to land. We will also be restructuring the financial institutions. We have a team working on this for the president's committee. They're looking at how the different land related financial institutions can be integrated. We will also be repealing the Subdivision of Agricultural Land Act. And most importantly, we'll be looking at some kind of overarching legislation around land redistribution. After the World Bank study, there was agreement that we should do our own study. We have a team working on a review of the World Bank's costing of land reform. We're looking at a combination of grants and subsidies. Our research study could take a year to complete. It will be valuable but we can't wait that long.

We have to move fast on redistribution, where we see two crucial areas - the removal of obstacles in the market and state assistance for people who can't work through the market. We also have to develop support for people who get land. Not only agricultural support, but also broader rural development.

Other areas which need attention are tenure reform and restitution (as contained in our proposal and legislation for the Land Claims Court process). In

retrospect, I believe we have spent too much time on the restitution issue.

My ministry will also be setting up a strategic planning unit before August. Similar units are likely to be set up in other ministries and we're waiting for guidelines about them.

*How do you intend to deal with the expectations which rural people may have of the new government's land reform programme, for example, the demands which emerged from the Community Land Conference held in February this year?*

We'll move decisively to let people know we are dealing with their issues. We have already dealt with some of the concerns which rural communities expressed. We have in the past said that we differ with some of the demands which emerged from the Community Land Conference, but we've also said that we know what underlies communities' sentiments.

For example, although we don't agree with the one farm one farmer demand, we will ensure that more people get access to productive land. We'll let communities know that we're not dragging our feet and have no intention of doing so, but that there will be unavoidable delays. I



think communication with people will of the utmost importance and we will also maintain a relationship with the National Land Committee.

*What relationship would your Ministry like to have with NGOs working in the rural land sector?*

It will be critical for us to have a close and cooperative relationship with them. NGOs have a good body of knowledge and we need to work with them. They're our strength.

*What changes can we expect to see around land reform by this time next year?*

The Land Claims Court will be fully functional and a number of claims would have been settled - some more successfully than others. Financial institutions would've been restructured so that black aspirant farmers have better access to finance. There will be new Bills and possibly Acts around tenure reform. Around land redistribution, there might already be allocation bodies to deal with this.

*How will you ensure that your ministry links with others effectively so that the different aspects of rural development are complemented?*

The best way will be through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), as it commits all departments and ministries. I was quite surprised to see a copy of the RDP lying on the desk of the Deputy Director-general for Land, Hennie Smit, when I visited him unannounced recently. And the Minister of Agriculture, Kraai van Niekerk, told me that he now sees a new mission for

his department. The Department of Agriculture has looked at the RDP and has tried to trim its current budget so that there is a pool of resources available.

Regarding land reform, I don't expect resistance to our position on the need for land to be used productively. We want to strengthen the rural directorate in the land reform department and also have a development planning unit which will help rural people to make decisions

*What are your greatest hopes?*

To develop a model for land restitution in close consultation with people working in the field and which meets the legitimate aspirations of rural people and victims of forced removal without exacerbating civil strife. In short, to manage the delicate process of transition.

I would've liked us to have moved more decisively to address people's land needs. But one of the difficulties has been the amount of time we had to spend on the property clause.

*What is the best thing that happened while you were head of the ANC's Land Desk?*

After many workshops and much dialogue we arrived at the point where people felt we had a workable, good position on restitution. The network of people involved in land issues that we've been dealing with on the restitution clause felt satisfied and we've now drafted an Act which we'll be presenting to parliament in August.

## About Derek Hanekom

THE 41 year old new Minister of Land Affairs is also the chairperson the management committee of the National Rural Development Forum, a recently established NGO, and a director of the Land and Agricultural Policy Centre.

Hanekom was educated in Cape Town and is currently completing a Masters in Agricultural Economics with the University of Pretoria. Between 1978 and 1983, he was farmed in the Magaliesburg - dairy, poultry and vegetables.

In 1983 he was sent to Pretoria Central, where he served a three year term. After his release in 1986, he worked for the Administrative Training Project in Johannesburg, before leaving for Zimbabwe, to join his wife. In Zimbabwe, he coordinated the Popular History Trust in Harare.

In 1990 he was appointed coordinator of the ANC's Land and Agricultural Desk and was responsible for the policy development in these areas. He was also the ANC's Yeoville Branch chair.