

In the news

Statistics of murders on SA farms since 1994 paint a terrible picture

By Jaco Hough-Coetzee

BLOOD ON THE LAND

MORE than 3 000 people – farmers and workers – have been murdered on farms across South Africa since 1994.

The figure represents more lives lost than in any war fought anywhere in the world in the same period, says AgriSA vice-president Dr Theo de Jager to illustrate the gravity of the situation.

Although most of these attacks were on white people, all races have been on the receiving end.

According to police statistics 62 per cent of the victims were white and 33 per cent black, with coloureds making up the remaining five per cent.

Transvaal Agricultural Union-SA regional manager Piet Kemp explains most attacks are made on farm homesteads at night when workers aren't near the premises. But when attacks happen during the day workers are just as likely to be targeted as farmers.

"Although extremist agitators proclaim all farmers treat their workers badly, pay poorly and force them to work in dreadful conditions this isn't the case," he says.

"In general relations are good between farmers and workers; this explains why attackers also

target the workers when they join the farmers in fighting them off."

This point of view is confirmed by a report on farm killings the police released in 2003. According to the report, farm workers had been responsible for only three per cent of attacks on farmers in the previous five years.

André Botha, chairman of AgriSA's safety committee, says most farm killings are criminal, not political.

"But Terre'Blanche's case could be the exception and the Malema song might have been the trigger."

Botha says at a high-level meeting on farm safety with agriculturists in March the police said farm attacks – as well as the level of brutality – had drastically increased since October last year.

He believes the "moral decay in the country" is definitely a contributing factor.

"There's no longer discipline among the youth and people don't respect one another and other people's lives. There's also a lack of dynamic leadership at all levels."

A climate has been created in South Africa of "If I don't get my way I'll kill you", Kemp says. "And that's not only on farms but also in towns and cities where people are killed for R10 or a cellphone."

But the farming community remains a soft target because they live in isolation from other people. "That's precisely why we have to maintain all possible safety measures," Botha says.

These include homes that are well barricaded and lit, patrols, dogs and good relations with farm workers who will report all strangers on the farm. Farmers also keep in touch with CB radios.

In Ventersdorp white and black faced off with barely a razorwire fence between them and Frans Cronjé, deputy head of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), says racial tension has risen dramatically in the past few weeks.

"And this could be because of the ANC's incitement to shoot and kill the ethnic white minority in the country."

He feels "in a society where law and order have largely collapsed the consequences of incitement to murder should be regarded in a serious light".

If it's proved in court the two accused in the Terre'Blanche murder acted in the belief that the ANC supported their actions and therefore a link with the Malema incitement is found the Terre'Blanche family could sue the government, he says.

But Cronjé doesn't exclude the possibility that a mere labour dispute could have led to the attack. □

SURVEYS AND STATISTICS

Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) 1999

Those who fell victim to crime in the previous year:

39% of white respondents

16% of black respondents

Institute of Security Studies (ISS) 2003

Those who felt safe during the day
64% of black respondents

62% of coloured respondents

35% of white respondents

ISS research 2007

Victims of crime at some point:

29% of white respondents

22% of black respondents

25% of coloured respondents

Markinor 2007

Those who fell victim to crime in the previous six months:

20% of white respondents

9% of black respondents

9% of coloured respondents

Police statistics

2 148 farm murders between 1997 and 2007

3 250 farm murders between 1994 and 2009

30% increase in farm murders between 1998 and 2002

