

08 July 2020

The President
Mr C. Ramaphosa
The Presidency
Government of the Republic of South Africa
Union Buildings
Government Avenue
PRETORIA
0001

By email: presidentrsa@presidency.gov.za

Dear Mr President

RESPONDING TO THE SCOURGE OF FARM ATTACKS

As you know, AfriForum is a South African civil rights organisation that aims to ensure that civil rights in general and the rights of minority communities in particular are protected.

During your address to the people of South Africa on 17 June 2020, you expressed your concern about the alarming rate at which women in South Africa are being targeted in violent attacks. You described the killing of women and children in South Africa as a pandemic. You said that “no less than a war is being waged against the women and children of our country” and you described this crime phenomenon as being committed “with a brutality that defies any form of comprehension.”

You expressed your sympathy for the victims when you mentioned their names and you spoke about them with a great sense of compassion. “We will speak for Tshegofatso Pule, Naledi Phangindawo, Nompumelelo Tshaka, Nomfazi Gabada, Nwabisa Mgwandela, Alecia Kortjie and Lindelwa Peni, all young women who were killed by men,” you said. “They are not just statistics. They had names and they had families and friends,” you continued. “Such violence has no place in society.”

Not only did you publicly express your condolences to the victims of these atrocious crimes, but you also announced steps to be taken by the South African government in this regard. You announced an emergency response plan to combat gender-based violence and femicide. You ensured that R1,6 billion in government funding was made available to support the implementation of the plan until the end of the financial year. You said that we had to ensure that the victims have access to support and services.

You announced that 10 government-owned buildings were transferred to the Department of Social Development to be used as shelters for survivors who want to leave abusive relationships. You also announced that progress had been made in broadening access to support for survivors. You added that 13 regional courts had been upgraded into sexual offences courts, 7 000 evidence collection kits had been distributed to every police station in the country and 1 000 survivor friendly rooms at police stations had been made available.



You spoke about special measures to be taken by the criminal justice system to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable, including that they should receive appropriate sentences for their horrific crimes.

You also said that, in order to effectively solve this crisis, we need to ask ourselves the difficult questions. You said that those who shamed and insulted the victims become complicit to these atrocious crimes.

Lastly, you said that people needed to consider the consequences of their silence.

Mr. President, it is in this context that we write to you about another pandemic that is terrorising this country: Farm attacks.

While we agree with your sentiment that special measures must be taken to prevent this pandemic of violence against women and children, we are equally alarmed by the silence of the South African government concerning the severe levels of brutality that people on South Africa's farms are experiencing.

When you were asked about this reality in New York in 2018, you said that "there are no killings of farmers, or white farmers in South Africa." Later, when you were asked to explain your comments, you claimed that farm attacks are miniscule and not worthy of a comprehensive, focused counterstrategy. You failed, however, to take cognisance of the fact that there are only a small number of commercial farmers left in South Africa. While there are tens of millions of women and children in South Africa, there are only about 35 000 commercial farmers left. When we count the number of victims, as you have done in your response in Parliament in 2018, it is also important to consider the size of the group in order to maintain perspective.

There were at least 40 farm attacks in South Africa during June 2020, in which at least five people were murdered. In the first week of July, at least four people were murdered on farms.

On 1 June 2020, Dr Roelof Botha (59), was hacked to death on his farm near Tulbach, reportedly with a panga.

On 6 June 2020, Edi Neumeister (67) and Margit Riebler (62) were attacked in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. According to media reports, Neumeister was "hacked into pieces" in front Riebler, while bravely fighting off a machete-wielding attacker.

On 6 June, Schalk (63) and Lana Coetzee (63) were attacked by three armed men. They were tortured with boiling water, but fortunately survived.

On 15 June 2020, Kosie Botha (63) was attacked by an unknown number of attackers on his farm near Vryheid, where he was tied up, gagged and strangled to death.

On 21 June 2020, Rudi Botha (60) and Edwin Kotze (64) were ordered by armed attackers to undress and lie on the floor. Kotze was fatally shot in the neck during the attack.

On 23 June 2020, Albert Küsel (63) was attacked on a smallholding near Sundra in Mpumalanga. He was tied up by an unknown number of attackers and beaten to death.

On 24 June 2020, Schalk van Heerden (55) and Sonja Mostert (52) were held by armed attackers for six hours. Mostert was partially undressed by her attackers and threatened with rape. Fortunately, they survived.

On 3 July 2020, the Afrikaans singer Wynand Breedt (45) was murdered on a farm near Worcester. He was shot several times in the chest.

On 3 July 2020 a British Falklands War hero was shot dead while protecting his partner during an armed raid on their farm. Former Royal Navy sailor Julian Stobbs, 59, was shot in the head and chest after four robbers broke into his farm near Lanseria as he slept on Friday.

On 4 July 2020, Ayoob Ahmedjan (32), his wife, Zakiyya (26) and their children (aged four and eight) were attacked by three armed men wearing face masks on a farm near Weenen. Ayoob tried to fight them off, but he was outnumbered and overpowered. The children were kicked by the attackers and taken to a bedroom. Zakiyya was then dragged into the bathroom. Despite her being pregnant, her attackers showed no remorse and murdered her by slitting her throat.

On 5 July 2020, Alan and Martie Wolmarans (44) and another elderly woman were attacked on a smallholding north of Pretoria. Alan was kicked and beaten severely but survived. Martie was shot dead.

Mr. President, these are but a few of the incidents which happened in the last month on South Africa's farms and smallholdings; however, we hope that these examples would be sufficient for you to comprehend the severity of the crisis.

Our plea is not for *special* treatment for South Africa's farming community, but merely *equal* treatment. We do not know why members of the South African government are actively attempting to downplay or even completely deny the extent of this crisis. In the absence of a proper explanation, we are left to come to our own conclusions. What we require is a recognition of the severity of the problem, which includes an acknowledgement that these attacks are unique and therefore deserve a unique counterstrategy.

The South African government has no qualm with developing focused counterstrategies in response to a variety of unique crimes. These include violence against women and children; gang-related violence; copper cable theft; cash-in-transit heists; and rhino poaching. It is only in respect to farm murders that we are suddenly confronted, at worst, with a justification of these crimes by cabinet members, or, at best, a downplay of the existence of the crisis.

What is it then that the South African government could do in response to these crimes, you might ask?

AfriForum proposes the following ten steps that the South African government should take to respond to the scourge of farm attacks and farm murders in South Africa:

1. Recognise the severity of the crisis and release statistics on farm attacks and farm murders on a quarterly basis.
2. Continue independent research on the true extent of the crisis, the manifestation of these attacks and the efficacy of a variety of counterstrategies.
3. Involve local communities through government funded structures to fulfil the role that was once played by the commando system.

4. Acknowledge farm attacks as a priority of the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (the Hawks).
5. Partner with civil society to strengthen the SAPS's response to farm attacks.
6. Revise the National Rural Safety Strategy (NRSS) to make particular provision for a focused reaction to farm attacks.
7. Establish specialist rural safety units.
8. Establish a holistic approach to farm attacks, as opposed to the exclusively localised focus in response to individual farm attacks as if they constitute isolated events.
9. Provide comprehensive victim support during the entire process.
10. Adopt legislation in terms of which farm attacks are dealt with more comprehensively. This should include the criminalisation of hate speech in which violence towards farmers is encouraged or romanticised.

Mr. President, there was great anticipation of your presidency. Your denial of the extent of the crisis has had a major impact on the victims and those affected by these acts of terror. You must prove that you are indeed the President of South Africa and not only the leader of those who support the political objectives of the ruling party.

We trust that you will read this letter with the gravity that it deserves and that you will respond appropriately.

With sincere regards



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