

Land redistribution can be achieved peacefully, says Mbeki

By SIPHO KHUMALO
Political Reporter

THERE was an urgent need to speed up land reform in South Africa, and if the people of the country worked together on this sensitive issue it could be resolved without any violence and conflict.

This was the message by President Thabo Mbeki to the singing and ululating people of the AmaHlubi tribe, near Estcourt, who braved pouring rain for the official return of their land, which was taken away from them by colonialists in the 1800s.

The weather could not dampen the festive spirit, with the tribespeople determined to witness Mbeki returning 8 600 hectares of land for which their forefathers had fought pitched battles to retain decades ago.

Hundreds of people of the AmaHlubi tribe converged at Ntabamhlophe village, singing and dancing as Mbeki officially handed back the land to the head of the tribe, Inkosi Muziwenkosi Hadebe.

In his address, done both in isiXhosa and English, Mbeki said South Africans such as the AmaHlubi should not be denied what was rightfully theirs, adding that this was a significant gesture as this was the land where they had grown up and their ancestors were buried.

"When we return the land, we restore a sense of belonging and pride in ourselves. I think if we work together like this we can make quite a deal of progress.

"There is no problem we cannot solve in this country by discussing it, including the land issue. If we approach it as a common problem we will be able to solve it without any conflict," he said.

He urged both white people and black people to share the challenge to uplift the disadvantaged and eradicate disparities, saying he was convinced that if South Africans worked together, they could make a great deal of progress.

The ceremony was also addressed by KwaZulu-Natal Premier Lionel Mtshali, who added his voice to the appeal for speedy land reform.

He warned, though, that if this was not done urgently, tension between commercial farmers and thousands of landless people could increase.

"The unresolved issue of land reform is a very sensitive one. It is about time that this matter is resolved in the best interest of all," Mtshali said.

The ceremony was also attended by top Government officials, including Agricultural and Land Affairs Minister Thoko Didiza, Public Works Minister Stella Sigcau, KwaZulu-Natal Transport Minister

S'bu Ndebele and Agriculture Minister Narend Singh.

The AmaHlubi's land was confiscated 130 years ago by the British colonial government and since then community leaders had been involved in several attempts to get it back.

The AmaHlubi project involves 8 600 hectares, comprising 43 portions of State-owned land and 534 beneficiary households.

Meanwhile, the idea of a new airport in Durban received a boost from Mbeki, who said that for the city to be a key entrance point for tourists it needed a bigger and better airport.

Examining options that could make Durban one of the major cities in the country at the meeting of Durban Metro opinion-makers, Mbeki said once the province had handled the issue of tourism Durban could very well become a major point of entry and exit for tourists. Durban Airport was too small to handle that task. "We may have to relocate it, build an airport elsewhere."

Mbeki's observation is set to add impetus to moves by Durban administrators and provincial government to relocate Durban Airport to La Mercy. At a summit of Durban businessmen, the Metro and provincial government committed the city to speeding up the process of establishing a new airport in La Mercy.

Minister bungled, says IFP



ELECTIONS 'MAY BE SCUTTLED'

Traditional leaders meet today to decide on the way forward after the Government failed to satisfy their demands, reports Political Correspondent Charles Phahlane from Cape Town

THE Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) has lashed out at Provincial Affairs and Local Government Minister Sydney Mufamadi for the Government's bungling of the concerns of traditional leaders.

Reacting to the postponement of the Municipal Structures Second Amendment Bill after the presiding officers of Parliament said that it raised Constitutional concerns, IFP spokesman Reverend Musa Zondi warned that this could "scuttle" progress towards the holding of local government elections.

"Everyone knows that Mufamadi has been hostile to traditional leaders despite his public statements to the contrary," Zondi said.

"He is one of the most hostile elements in Government against the concerns of traditional leaders. He will have to take the blame for this."

Zondi said that President Thabo Mbeki was the only one now who could offer leadership on an issue he described as possibly the most trying since Mbeki took over as president.

Mbeki, addressing members of the Windsor community in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal, at the weekend, said that he hoped that the unresolved issue around traditional leadership would not cause a crisis for the December 5 elections.

"I hope everybody will co-operate to ensure free and fair elections and that there will be no crisis."

He said that after the elections the

Government would immediately start reviewing the 1 500 pieces of legislation pertaining to traditional leaders.

This, he said, should clear up the relationship between traditional and democratic leadership in which both forms were recognised.

"This can't be done overnight."

The president said that the Government hoped to deal with the review of legislation on traditional leaders by June next year.

"It is clear we have to put certain things in place through legislation as not to diminish the powers of traditional leaders."

Inkosi Patekile Holomisa said he understood why Parliament could not proceed with the legislation, but would put this to traditional leaders.

Excluded

Now that the Bill had been postponed, traditional leaders would seek to add other issues that were excluded due to time, he said.

Traditional leaders will meet today to decide on a way forward.

Mufamadi had to postpone three times the announcement of December 5 as the local government election date as traditional leaders threatened to stay away from the elections if their concerns were not addressed.

The Government asked Parliament to hold a special sitting to pass the amendment Bill and tabled a different version of the Bill.

National Assembly Speaker Dr Frene Ginwala said that the special sittings scheduled for today and tomorrow for the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces to respectively consider the Bill had been cancelled.

She said this was due to the unconstitutionality of the amendment Bill.

News

Rumour that Buthelezi will quit Cabinet 'is hogwash'

CAPE TOWN: The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) has labelled "absolute hogwash" a news report that its leader, Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi may quit the Cabinet over the way the Government has dealt with traditional leaders.

The front-page report in the *Sunday Independent*, quoting "close colleagues", said Buthelezi had told them he could not see a role in Government for much longer.

It said an IFP source maintained Buthelezi was "definitely considering quitting" if President Thabo

Mbeki did not make good on a promise that the powers of traditional leaders would be guaranteed before the local government elections.

The report follows the eleventh-hour withdrawal on Friday of an amendment to the Municipal Structures Act, which was meant to have accommodated traditional leaders' concerns.

However, IFP national spokesman Reverend Musa Zondi said the report was "absolute hogwash".

"It's a thumbsuck from people

who failed to read the situation properly," he said. "If anyone thinks Buthelezi has reached the end of his tether, he is grossly mistaken."

People did not understand that Buthelezi was a force for stability, and things would be difficult in Government and in the country without his influence.

On a suggestion that he himself was being tipped as Buthelezi's successor in Cabinet, Zondi said he had other priorities.

The chairman of the Democratic Alliance's (DA) federal council, Mr

James Selfe, who has been dealing with the traditional leaders issue, said he believed Buthelezi was very upset over the legislation, and would have regarded its withdrawal as a major breach of the undertaking he was apparently given by Mbeki.

Selfe said the aborted legislation had been tautological or "downright insulting", in that it merely specified in law what traditional leaders did anyway.

However, the fact of the matter was that certain undertakings had been given, and had expressly not

been met. "Under these circumstances, Buthelezi probably feels very, very let down. Having said that, it's not the first time he's threatened to quit... so I will believe it when I see it," Selfe said.

DA home affairs spokesman Mr Mike Waters said Buthelezi had been undermined by the African National Congress by being given a department which was very important, but underfunded and overloaded.

"It's been set up for failure, I believe," said Waters. - Sapa

IFP denies that Buthelezi wants to quit

By Jimmy Seepe
Political Correspondent

THE Inkatha Freedom Party yesterday dismissed as highly irresponsible claims that its leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi was about to quit politics in frustration as a result of the Government's failure to meet the demands of traditional leaders.

The claims about Buthelezi's imminent departure from the political scene were published yesterday by a Sunday newspaper which alleged that the IFP leader was increasingly being alienated and disgruntled by President Thabo Mbeki.

The paper claimed that Buthelezi considered the move following a decision to withdraw the controversial Municipal Structures Second Amendment Bill which was supposed to be adopted today by MPs to fast-track the Bill ahead of the December 5 local government elections.

Buthelezi is thought to have confided to several close colleagues recently that he could not see a role for himself in the Government for much longer. The paper claimed he was likely to be succeeded by IFP national spokesman and MP Reverend Musa Zondi.

The Speaker of the National Assembly Dr Frene Ginwala said it was Parliament's view that the Bill be re-published because it was different from the version gazetted for public comment on November 3.

"It was a Section 75 Bill which meant that mandates were not necessary from the provincial legislature."

Zondi told *Sowetan* that the story was a "thumb suck" as Buthelezi had never considered quitting politics at this stage". He said there was never a meeting of the IFP leadership where such a suggestion was made by Buthelezi.

"People, including President Thabo Mbeki, know that Buthelezi plays a constructive role in government and he is a source of stability in the country."

Regarding his possible elevation, Zondi said: "I'm not about to become a Cabinet minister as claimed. I have many ambitions in life but not to become a Cabinet minister."

He said it was unfortunate that an impression was being created that things would be better in the country once Buthelezi had quit politics.

ANC BLAMED FOR TRADITIONAL LEADERS 'BUNGLE'

Buthelezi

'won't quit'

PHINDILE NGUBANE,
ROBERT BRAND & SAPA

THE IFP yesterday made it clear that its leader, Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, had no intention of quitting the cabinet over the way the government had dealt with traditional leaders.

Speculation about his quitting the cabinet arose in a report yesterday which quoted "close colleagues" as saying he had told them he could not see a role in the government for himself much longer.

The report followed the 11th-hour withdrawal on Friday of an amendment to the Municipal Structures Act, which was meant to have accommodated traditional leaders' concerns.

Dr Buthelezi was not available for comment, but IFP national spokesman Musa Zondi, who has been tipped by some to take over as leader, claimed it was "absolute hogwash".

"If anyone thinks Buthelezi has reached the end of his tether, he is grossly mistaken," he said.

People did not understand that Dr Buthelezi was a force for stability and things would be difficult in the government and in the country without his influence.

On the suggestion that he himself was being tipped as Dr Buthelezi's successor in the cabinet, Mr Zondi said he had other priorities.

Yesterday a source close to the traditional leaders said they would not boycott the December 5 municipal elections after the decision by parliament to shelve the legislation aimed at clearly defining their role.

President Mbeki said he hoped



BUTHELEZI
Report was 'hogwash'

the unresolved issue would not cause a crisis for the elections. Speaking at an ANC election campaign tour in Ladysmith, he said that immediately after the elections the government would start to review the legislation, a process it hoped would be resolved by June.

A meeting of the coalition of traditional leaders would be held in Pretoria today to discuss the decision taken by the Speaker of the national assembly, Dr Frene Ginwala, to cancel a parliamentary sitting to pass the Municipal Structures Second Amendment Bill.

The legislation was meant to be fast-tracked through parliament as a means of addressing traditional leaders' concerns before the elections took place.

Dr Ginwala withdrew the Bill on Friday, saying it was different from the version which had been gazetted earlier this month.

The gazetted version was a section 75 Bill, whereas the one tabled before parliament was a section 76 Bill, which required provincial con-

sent. Dr Ginwala pointed out that there was not enough time to obtain provincial consent before the elections.

The new Bill would be considered when parliament reconvened in January.

"Because of the significant difference, it was parliament's view that the Bill has to be republished, and time allowed for public comment and public hearing.

"Based on that, we felt we could not consider the legislation," said Dr Ginwala.

Opposition parties, however, have alleged that government bungling led to the cancellation of the parliamentary sitting.

"It is a poor display of incompetence by somebody... (there has been) remarkable incompetence behind the scenes," said MP Peter Smith, of the IFP, which has supported the leaders in their demand to be made part of local government in rural areas.

The DA said the government had tried - but failed - to use parliament as "a forum to condone badly planned and executed procedures".

Spokesman Francois Beukman said the blame for the failure to address traditional leaders' concerns before the municipal elections lay at the ANC's door.

The chairman of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of SA, Chief Patekile Holomisa, said: "We rely on the president's commitment to the resolutions we took on the matter."

A source close to the traditional leaders dispelled speculation that the Bill's withdrawal would cause a further rift between the leaders and the government and pose a serious threat to the elections.