

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON
KWAZULU-NATAL**

"DEFENDING THE WEAK"

TO **ALL MEDIA**

DATE **23 SEPTEMBER 2008**

PLACE **CECIL EMMERT HALL, VRYHIED**

MEDIA STATEMENT

NDOSI WARNS AGAINST PEOPLE TAKING THE LAW INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

In an effort to bring the law closer to the people for better understanding and protection; the KwaZulu-Natal Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster in partnership with the South African Women's Lawyers Association have converged onto the town of Vryheid with an intention to educate the people of that area of their rights particularly on issues pertaining to land and stock theft.

This meeting which is the first one that is held under the banner of a project known as Siyabonisana (We inform each other) was held at Cecil Emmert Hall in Vryheid on 23 September 2008. It came after a resolution from a previous meeting held in Stillwaters where it emerged that there is a need to visit the area of Vryheid in order to address issues pertaining to poor relations between farmers and farm dwellers.

As part of the day's proceedings, a number of lawyers were available at the venue to give free legal advice to members of the community on matters such as land rights, domestic violence, maintenance, criminal justice issues, stock theft and many others.

The event was planned as an imbizo and the people of Vryheid were given an opportunity to air their views and concerns regarding different aspects of the criminal justice system. They especially aired concerns on how they have experienced the law in their areas. What came out from the questions and

comments that the members of the community asked during the imbizo, was that there are a number of issues pertaining to how cases relating to farm abuses, stock theft and land rights are handled by the police, the magistrates and the local government which need serious attention. It also became clear that this has led to the community not having trust in the police because they are seen as being biased towards farmers.

Speaking after hearing these concerns KZN MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison Mr. Bheki Cele noted, "There is a problem in this area regarding the Law. There is a problem in this area regarding magistrates."

Expressing his disappointment with the lack of attendance at the imbizo by members of the farming community, Cele said that "maybe a special meeting needs to be called for farmers only because there obviously is a problem that is preventing them from coming forward to us to try and resolve challenges faced by both farmers and farm workers/dwellers.

Cele also used the opportunity to discourage those members of the community that had suggested that if the law is failing to work, they would take matters into their own hands by saying that those taking the law into their own hands would be dealt with.

On the many problems and complaints that have been heard from the community regarding the treatment that farm workers get from farmers in Vryheid, Cele continued to say that "we as the people need to come together and work with the police to address the problem of crime in Vryheid."

Meanwhile, Provincial Police Commissioner Mr. Hamilton Ngidi had earlier told the community gathered at the Siyabonisana event that if they are saying the police are not taking them seriously when they report cases against farmers, it means they are taking sides and are failing to do the job they are paid for. "If you are saying that when cases are reported against farmers the police do not come, but five vans are dispatched when a farmer opens a case against a farm dweller, then it means there is a problem with the people in power at those police stations, and they need to be dealt with accordingly", he said.

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