

Communiqué of the Southern African Regional Conference on Farm Workers Human Rights and Security.

Introduction

The delegates to the Southern African Regional Conference on Farm Workers Human Rights and Security met in Harare from the 10th to the 14th of September 2001 to discuss issues relating to Farm Workers rights and human security.

The conference notes with concern the continued marginalisation and exclusion of farm worker communities from main stream development through out the region. This is despite the fact that farm-workers constitute a significant proportion (10-20%) of the population in the individual SADC countries. Delegates further note that the farm-workers are the most vulnerable group and live in conditions of abject poverty despite the significant contributions they make to the economic development of the region.

In light of the above observations, delegates made the following recommendations to ensure that the living and working conditions and the security of farm worker communities is acted upon and improved:

Weak Labor Legislation

The Conference expresses concern over the discriminatory labor laws that marginalise farm-workers throughout the region. The conference further notes with concern the existence of weak legislative provisions that cannot be enforced for the benefit of the farm-workers and do not enable farm workers to express their rights. Delegates therefore call upon SADC states to put in place legislation that will benefit farm workers.

Citizenship Rights

The delegates are concerned by the unwillingness of states in the SADC region to extend citizenship rights to farm-workers and their families in spite of having lived and worked in respective states for many years and in spite of having contributed to the economic development of these countries. Delegates therefore call upon member states to extend citizenship rights to affected farm workers.

Basic Human Rights

Delegates note that the basic human rights extended to other citizens in the SADC states are not automatic to the farm-workers as they are often looked down upon and treated as second class citizens. The delegates urge the SADC governments to recognize the rights of farm-workers and to enforce these rights. Delegates further call upon labor, non-governmental organizations and other interested and progressive parties to take the lead in

strengthening national as well as regional bodies in articulating the needs of farm-workers.

Women Farm-workers/dwellers

The delegates note with concern the vulnerability of women farm workers/dwellers and call upon all stakeholders to come up with integrated measures to enable female farm workers/dwellers to escape from poverty and oppressive relationships.

HIV/AIDS

Delegates are concerned at the extent and spread of HIV/AIDS in the farm communities especially in the face of inadequate resources to care for those affected. Delegates recommend that Governments in the region ensure that farm-workers and their families access free treatment in light of the meager wages they earn. Delegates also recommend that Governments sponsor extensive education campaigns on HIV/AIDS in farm communities to influence behavior change.

Child Labor and Child Abuse

Delegates are concerned at the increase in the use of child labor and child abuse throughout the region and especially in farm communities and the absence of clear legislation to punish the perpetrators of such acts. Delegates call upon governments in the region, Labor Federations, NGOs, and

community groups to push for legislation that will seek to address the issues of child labor and child abuse.

Globalization and the Plight of Farm Workers

Delegates note with concern the negative impact of globalization caused by some of the agricultural and trade agreements, which have further marginalised the farm-workers. The delegates call upon SADC Governments to develop policies that seek to protect and cushion the poor in general and farm-workers in particular against the negative effects of globalization.

Debt Cancellation

Delegates call upon the SADC governments to intensify the campaign for the existing debt cancellation and compensation for colonial injustices and to channel funds towards the improvement of health infrastructure especially in farm communities.

Xenophobia

Delegates note with concern the growing xenophobia in the region and its effects on farm-workers. Delegates further note that xenophobia runs counter to the principles and ideals of African Renaissance. The delegates call for the outlawing of all forms of discrimination especially against farm-workers throughout the SADC region and that the SADC summit expedite the move for a fully-fledged regional community with SADC citizenship.

Farm Workers and Land Reform

The conference acknowledges the historical injustices in terms of land disposition in the region, and the various governments' attempts to address them. However, delegates note with concern the systematic exclusion of farm workers from the process of land reform and land redistribution. Delegates therefore call upon all SADC governments to implement fair, transparent and gender aware land reform programs and ensure that the farm-workers are considered for resettlement under the land reform programs. Further more the delegates condemn the abuse of farm-workers political, social and economic rights by political parties, governments, and farm owners especially during land redistribution exercises.

Regional Summit

Delegates call for the holding of a regional Summit comprising governments, farm-worker representatives and supporting civic society organizations where issues of the plight of farm-workers could be discussed and governments make undertakings on dealing with the plight of the farm-workers human rights and security.