



## **South Africa-ns urged to back government reverse the legacy of the 1913 Natives Land Act**

By Neliswa Lizeka Chiloane

President Jacob Zuma has urged South Africans to back government in ensuring that the country reverses the legacy of unjust legislation that led to the misery of its citizens. The country on 19 June 2013 marked a 100 years since the promulgation of the 1913 Natives Land Act which dispossessed land from the black majority. The then racist colonial government passed the Act that stipulated that blacks could no longer own land. It also restricted black people from buying or occupying land except as employees of a “white person”.

The Natives Land Act of 1913 was just the beginning. It was followed by a number of laws such as Natives Administration Act and Natives Urban Areas Act which severely restricted and repressed black people.

“The apartheid government also relocated all black people into improvised homelands and to poorly serviced townships. Since they could no longer provide food security for themselves and their families, they were forced to look for work far away from their families. The Act marked the beginning of socio-economic challenges the country is facing today such as landlessness, poverty and inequality,” President Zuma said at the 1913 Natives Land Act centenary commemoration gala dinner in Cape Town.

The president said government in 1994 committed to address, in accordance to the rule of law, the inequalities in land ownership and particularly to those dispossessed as a result of it. Government then undertook to redistribute 30% of land to black people by 2014. Progress has been made in this regard however it has been slow.

“We have admitted that the 2014 redistribution target will not be met. Only 6.7 million hectares of land had so far been transferred through redistribution and restitution,” the president said.

The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, in a further effort, of redressing past injustices has drafted the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment and the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Bills. These two Bills, according to the president will help the reversal process.

President Zuma informed delegates that government was already looking ahead as to what the agriculture sector should look like in the next 30 years through the National Development Plan. “In this case, it is important to stress that land reform is not just about how much land is given back to claimants, but should include skills transfer. Claimants should be empowered to use land productively for job creation, food security and attracting young people to farming. “

Government will provide better incentives for commercial farmers that are willing and capable of mentoring smallholder farmers. We will also provide adequate post-settlement support to new landowners so that land continues to be productive.

The president further urged citizens to engage in a meaningful debate about the acceleration of land restitution, within our constitutional framework.