

Symbolic win for Zimbabwean farmers

The auction of a house belonging to the Zimbabwean government offered some comfort - though largely symbolic - to farmers dispossessed of their land by the government of Robert Mugabe.



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It was the final step in their legal challenge to land seizures and the R3.76m raised from the sale of a Kenilworth, Cape Town, house would cover legal fees.

"This was the first time in history that a decision of a human rights tribunal in Africa led to the sale of a property of the country that has been guilty of human rights abuses," Willie Spies AfriForum's legal representative said. AfriForum represented a group of white farmers claiming compensation from the Zimbabwean government for the loss of their land.

A punitive cost order was handed down by the tribunal of the Southern African Development Community in 2009 after finding that Mugabe's land-grab programme was unlawful.

AfriForum assisted the farmers to have the findings of the tribunal registered and enforced in SA after Zimbabwean courts refused to do so. After the successful registration of the tribunal order in the High Court in Pretoria, properties belonging to the Zimbabwean government in Cape Town were attached for auction to cover the "debt to the farmers".

Independent political analyst Daniel Silke yesterday said that the auction of the Zimbabwean government property was a

"symbolic victory" for the farmers and AfriForum and would again heighten awareness about that country's "disastrous" land reform policies.

The property was occupied by tenants, which meant that it was not protected by diplomatic immunity as it was used for commercial purposes, AfriForum said.

The Zimbabwean government hit out at AfriForum yesterday saying that the group had proceeded with the sale even though R800,000 had been paid to settle the punitive cost order required to prevent the auction. According to Harare's Financial Gazette newspaper, Zimbabwe's ambassador to SA, Isaac Moyo, said the auction was a "cheap political gimmick". But Spies said the auction had been above board.

Source: Business Day

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