

New deal to benefit De Doorns farm workers

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Immigrants from Lesotho working on farms in De Doorns near Worcester are among some 400,000 Lesotho nationals to benefit from the Lesotho Special Permit system announced by the Department of Home Affairs.



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Minister of Home Affairs Malusi Gigaba announced last November the plan to regularise the stay of Lesotho nationals living illegally in South Africa who had been in the country since September 2015.

Permits will be issued from March 2016 and will be valid for four years, from 1 May 2016 to 30 April 2020. There would be a moratorium on deportations of Lesotho citizens until 31 December 2016, Gigaba said. He said the programme would benefit 400,000 Lesotho nationals.

Tumisang Qoyi, chairperson of Thol-ulwazi Developmental Project in De Doorns, which works with foreign nationals, said the organisation was "very excited" about the announcement.

Relief for workers from Lesotho

He said there were about 3,500 Lesotho nationals working permanently in De Doorns and another 1,500 seasonal workers. As a result of the new programme, he said, they would no longer need to use fraudulent documents and they would not be vulnerable to wrongful treatment by employers.

De Doorns was the scene of farm worker strikes over minimum wages in 2012, with some South African farm workers complaining that farmers chose to employ seasonal workers from Lesotho and Zimbabwe and pay them less.

"I feel very happy about this announcement. I am relieved because I now can work and stay in South Africa without fear," said Zanele Ntonbi, who works on grape farms in De Doorns. She said she had been working in South Africa since October 2013, using a visitor's visa and having to return to the border every 30 days. She said she sent money back to Lesotho for her family. Neither of her parents was working.

"I am really happy the government of South Africa has shown love for us. In Lesotho it is not easy to get employed," said Nokuzani Sipkinda, another farm worker. She said she had decided to come to South Africa after her matric in Lesotho to help the family back home. "My father passed away so my mother is looking after the other children."

Bernard Toyambi, director of People Against Suffering Oppression and Poverty (PASSOP), welcomed the announcement of the special permits for Lesotho citizens.

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