

Zimbabwe offers longer leases to white farmers

Zimbabwe has announced that white farmers still in business after controversial land reforms will be able to obtain 99-year leases, signalling a new government approach to the key agricultural sector. President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who replaced the ousted Robert Mugabe in November, has vowed to revive the moribund economy, boost investment and create employment after years of decline.



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The agriculture ministry directed "all remaining white farmers be issued with 99-year leases instead of five as per previous arrangements," according to a statement seen by AFP on Wednesday.

Thousands of white farmers were forced off their land by violent mobs or evicted, with Mugabe saying the reforms would help black people marginalised under British colonial rule. Critics blame the land redistribution, which began in 2000, for the collapse in agricultural production that saw the former regional breadbasket become a perennial food importer.

Mnangagwa, a former Mugabe ally who came to power following a military intervention, has pledged to compensate farmers who lost their properties but said they would not be given their land back.

Ben Gilpin, director of the Commercial Farmers' Union, reacted cautiously to the policy announcement. "We have seen the letter and we are seeking clarification," he told AFP. "People have gone to various offices and there hasn't been a uniform response."

The CFU says there are about 200 white farmers remaining in Zimbabwe.

Source: AFP

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