

Zim white farmers who lost their farms 'may soon be compensated'

The Zimbabwean government has reportedly set up a committee that will spearhead the process of compensating white farmers whose farms were seized during the country's controversial land reform programme.



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According to Daily News, President Emmerson Mnangagwa's administration appointed the permanent secretary of the land and agriculture ministry, Ringson Chitsiko, to chair the committee until October next year. The report said that the appointment of Chitsiko was seen as "signalling the commencement of effort to make agricultural production attractive again" in the southern African country.

The development came just a few weeks after some of the evicted white farmers demanded a \$9bn pay-off for assets expropriated during the land redistribution programme. The Financial Gazette quoted sources as saying that the compensation claim had since been tabled before President Emmerson Mnangagwa. The figure included land, which the farmers valued using regional rates, as well as fixed assets, the report said.



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Zimbabwe embarked on a violent land reform programme in 2000, taking over white-owned farms to resettle landless blacks. Thousands of white farmers were forced off their land by mobs or evicted, with ex-president Robert Mugabe saying the reforms would help black people marginalised under British colonial rule.

Critics blamed the land redistribution for the collapse in agricultural production that saw the former regional breadbasket become a perennial food importer.

The Daily News reported that close to 690,000 hectares of land were forcibly taken from the white farmers including farming equipment, livestock and personal possessions.

A new farming system

Mnangagwa told the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland recently that his new government believed thinking along racial lines was "outdated" when it came to farming and land ownership.

He said that white Zimbabwean farmers left on the land had integrated "happily" into the country's new farming system, albeit on smaller land holdings.

"We don't want to think along racial lines - that there are white farmers and black farmers. That should be a philosophy of the past," Mnangagwa said.

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