

Agri SA

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AGRI SA SE REAKSIE OP HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH SE BEVINDINGE “Menseregte situasie in Suid-Afrika se vrugte- en wynbedrywe”

AGRI SA's RESPONSE TO FINDINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH ON “Human Rights Conditions in South Africa's Fruit and Wine Industries”

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AGRI SA SE REAKSIE OP HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH SE BEVINDINGE “Menseregte situasie in Suid-Afrika se vrugte- en wynbedrywe”

“Agri SA verwerp Human Rights Watch se verslag oor die menseregte situasie in Suid-Afrika se vrugte- en wynbedrywe as eensydig, kwaadwillig, onbillik en hoogs onverantwoordelik. Agri SA bevraagteken ook die navorsingsmetodologie en dus die geloofwaardigheid van die betrokke bevindinge,” sê Agri SA president, Johannes Möller.

Daar moet kennis geneem word van die feit dat alle sagtevrugte-uitvoerplase wat die fokus van Human Rights Watch se ondersoek was derde-party geakkrediteer is vir GlobalGap (good agricultural practices) en ook Etiese Handel-gesertifiseer is soos vereis deur die internasionale kleinhandel. Daarom is dit hoogs onwaarskynlik dat die beweringe in die verslag 'n ware weergawe van toestande op plase in die Wes-Kaap is.

Verder voldoen Agri SA en sy affiliasies aan nasionale wetgewing en internasionale norms ten opsigte van landboustandaarde en vereis dat hul boerelede dieselfde doen, met in agneming van die waardevolle bydrae wat plaaswerkers lewer tot die sukses van die landboubedryf en die noodsaaklikheid daarvan om hulle dienooreenkomstig te behandel. Waar probleme wel bestaan is Agri SA en sy affiliasies daartoe verbind om sodanige probleme aan te spreek. Agri SA sal ook nie enige boer wat skuldig is aan menseregte vergrype of ernstige wetsoortredings beskerm nie en sal eis dat die toepaslike regsproses gevolg word.

Agri SA bevraagteken die toereikendheid en samestelling van die steekproef van 260 mense. Hiervan was 85 blykbaar plaaswerkers, 32 voormalige plaaswerkers en 16 plaasbewoners. Hoe kan só 'n klein en waarskynlik noukeurig geselekteerde steekproef ooit gebruik word om die situasie van 121 000 plaaswerkers te beskryf?” vra Möller. Onderhoude is gevoer met slegs 14 plaaseienaars of verteenwoordigers van plaaseienaars, d.w.s. minder as 0,3 persent van die nagenoeg 5 000 produsente in die Wes-Kaap. Die res van die steekproef bestaan uit 'n wye spektrum verteenwoordigers van ander organisasies. Die verslag lees soos volg: “*In baie gevalle is onderhoude met plaaswerkers of plaasbewoners gereël met behulp van organisasies wat werk met of dienste verskaf aan daardie populasies. Vakbonde fasiliteer die onderhoude met sommige van hul lede.*” Dit het gelei tot 'n situasie waar 161 van diegene wat ondervra is nie regstreeks by boerdery

betrokke was nie. Sommige van die organisasies is ook bekend vir hul vyandige houding teenoor kommersiële boere asook georganiseerde landbou en was in die verlede onwillig om met boereorganisasies saam te werk ten einde beweerde oortredings gesamentlik aan te spreek. Agri SA se insette is grootliks geïgnoreer.

Die stellings wat deur plaaswerkers, voormalige plaaswerkers en plaasbewonders gemaak is, is blykbaar ook nie behoorlik geverifieer nie. In hierdie opsig lees die verslag soos volg: *“Gegewe die voorsorgmaatreëls wat ons getref het om te verseker dat die ondervraagdes geen negatiewe gevolge sou ly nie, het ons in nagenoeg alle gevalle óf die plaaseienaars/toesighouers óf die plaaswerkers/plaasbewoners van ‘n plaas ondervra, maar nie beide nie.”* Dit plaas ‘n vraagteken oor die objektiwiteit van die verslag en sy veroordelende bevindinge.

Die verslag is ook uiters negatief wat betref die protokol vir plaastoegang wat Agri SA met verskeie staatsdepartemente beding het. “Regeringsdepartemente, besighede en privaat huishoudings het die reg om hul veiligheid te verseker deur toegangsbeheermaatreëls toe te pas. Boere en plaaswerkers – wat erg blootgestel is aan veiligheids- en sekuriteitsrisiko’s – het sekerlik dieselfde regte as ander mense in die samelewing. Daarom is daar niks onheilspellend omtrent boere wat vooraf kennisgewing van ‘n beoogde besoek of inspeksie op die plaas vereis nie. Human Rights Watch stel ook nie ‘n alternatiewe reëling voor nie. Agri SA sal dus voortgaan om sy lede aan te raai om die protokol toe te pas as ‘n maatreeël om die veiligheid van diegene wat op plase woon te bevorder,” sê Möller.

“Dit is potensieel ‘n gevaarlike situasie vir die landbou wanneer persepsies geskep word deur uitkomstes van swak navorsing waarop beleidsbesluite gegrond kan word. Agri SA sal objektiewe en gesaghebbende navorsing oor arbeidstoestande op plase asook die drywers van sekere tendense verwelkom. Daarom beraadslaag Agri SA tans met die Internasionale Arbeidsorganisasie as onafhanklike liggaam om sodanige navorsing te fasiliteer,” aldus Möller.

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AGRI SA’S RESPONSE TO FINDINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH ON “Human Rights Conditions in South Africa’s Fruit and Wine Industries”

“Agri SA rejects the Human Rights Watch report on “Human Rights Conditions in South Africa’s Fruit and Wine Industries” as being one-sided, malicious, unfair and highly irresponsible. Agri SA questions the research methodology and therefore the credibility of the relevant findings,” said Johannes Möller, president of Agri SA.

It should be noted that all deciduous fruit export farms, which were the focus of the Human Rights Watch investigation, are third party accredited for GlobalGap (good agricultural practices) and Ethical Trade certified as required by the international retail trade. It is therefore highly unlikely that the allegations as contained in the report could be a true reflection of prevailing circumstances on farms in the Western Cape.

Furthermore, Agri SA and its affiliates subscribe to national legislation and international norms on labour standards and require from its farmer members to do so as well, with due regard to the valued contributions farm workers' to the success of the farming industry and the need to treat them accordingly. Where real problems does exist, Agri SA and its affiliates are committed to assist in finding solutions. Agri SA will also not protect any farmer who is guilty of human rights abuses or serious breaches of the law and demands that due legal process should be followed.

Agri SA questions the adequacy and composition of the research sample of 260 people. Of these, 85 were apparently farm workers, 32 former farm workers and 16 were farm dwellers. How can such a small, and probably carefully selected sample ever be used to describe the situation of 121 000 farm workers", asked Möller. Only 14 farm owners or representatives of farm owners were interviewed, representing less than 0.3 percent of the approximately 5 000 producers of the Western Cape. A wide spectrum of representatives from other organisations formed the balance of the sample. The report states that "*In many cases interviews with farm workers or farm dwellers were arranged with the assistance of organizations that work with or provide services to those populations. Trade unions facilitated interviews with some of their members*". This resulted in a situation where 161 of those that were interviewed, were not directly involved in farming. Some of those organisations are also known to be antagonistic towards commercial farmers as well as organised agriculture and have in the past been unwilling to cooperate with the farmer organisations to address alleged transgressions collectively. Agri SA's input was largely ignored.

It is also apparent that statements made by farm workers, former farm workers and farm dwellers were not duly verified. In this respect the report indicates that: "*Given the precautions that we took to ensure that no negative repercussions arose for interviewees, in almost all cases we interviewed either the farm owners/supervisors, or the farm workers/dwellers, from a farm, but not both.*" This places a question mark over the objectivity of the report and its condemning findings.

The report is also very negative about the farm access protocol, which Agri SA negotiated with various state departments. "Government departments, businesses and private households have the right to ensure their safety by applying access control measures. Farmers and farm workers - who are severely exposed to safety and security risks – surely have similar rights as others in our society. There is therefore nothing sinister about farmers requiring an advance notification of an intended visit to or inspection of a farm. The Human Rights Watch also does not propose an alternative arrangement. Agri SA will therefore continue to advise its members to apply the protocol as a measure to advance the safety of those living on farms", said Möller.

"It is a potential dangerous situation for agriculture if perceptions are created by the outcomes of impaired research on which policy decisions could be based. Agri SA would therefore welcome objective and authoritative research into the labour conditions on farms as well as into the drivers of certain trends. For this reason Agri SA is consulting with the International Labour Organisation as independent body to facilitate such research," said Möller.

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