

Press

Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations

The power of ideas

Media Contact: Marius Roodt Head of Campaigns Tel: 063-694-2611 Email: marius@irr.org.za

General Media Contacts: Michael Morris Tel: 066 302 1968 Email: michael@irr.org.za
Kelebogile Leepile Tel: 011 482 7221 ext: 2018 Email: kelebogile@irr.org.za

Patrice Motsepe's 'presidential' remarks on land and agriculture welcomed

Prominent businessman Patrice Motsepe's comments at AgriSA's annual congress are to be welcomed for demonstrating an understanding of the key issues relating to land and agriculture, and for providing a worthy vision for addressing them.

'Mr Motsepe's contribution represented the sort of intervention that the country's land politics has been crying out for. It was measured and thoughtful – actually quite presidential,' says IRR project manager Terence Corrigan.

With a country demanding direction, certainty and, above all, prudence on land policy, Mr Motsepe forthrightly addressed some of the most pressing issues confronting the farming sector.

These included acknowledging the need for policy and regulatory certainty to encourage investment, and recognising that farmers had to believe in the future of the country and their industry if they were to contribute to it.

He was also commendably outspoken on the issue of violent crime against farming communities. His message that they are facing very real threats and that they are 'not on their own' are welcome ones. Some 353 farmers and farm workers have been murdered since 2012/2013, and the IRR has argued that this phenomenon is too often ignored, denied or politicised – it should be recognised for the serious problem it is, and robustly combated.

Mr Motsepe is reported to have said: 'Every single farmer, black and white, as well as all participants in the agri-economy must keep in their mind, and according to their judgement... that they feel that the industry has a future, that they want to invest and that their right to land and assets are protected, and will be protected... doesn't matter what politicians think.'

In the IRR's view, Corrigan argues, the current thrust of policy – in particular the drive towards Expropriation without Compensation – does little but create confusion and trepidation which are doing great harm to South Africa's farming economy.

Says Corrigan: 'The implications of allowing current trends to continue are dire. Without the confidence and certainty that Mr Motsepe correctly identifies as being key to any economic future, farming in South Africa – along with the agro-processing value chains, the export earnings and food security – will be placed at risk. Mr Motsepe is to be applauded for articulating these concerns. It is to be hoped that they will carry some weight with the country's decision makers, and exercise some influence on them in charting a more productive course for the sector and for meaningful, constructive land reform.'

Ends