

Monitoring farms is a challenge says minister

The government had done its best to promote the rights of farm workers but monitoring labour conditions remained a challenge, Agriculture minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson said on Monday (26 November).



"We are not powerless. The law is there but the implementation and monitoring of the law is our challenge," she said at a *New Age* breakfast in Johannesburg.

"Government monitors. Government isn't there every day to ensure implementation. It cannot be government's sole responsibility."

She said civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations and unions had a role to play in making sure rights were upheld.

The agriculture and labour departments also relied on oversight visits to farms by MPs.

"When the labour officials visit, farmers do a little bit of window dressing," she said.

She suggested that the labour department conduct surprise visits, rather than pre-arranged visits, to combat such tactics.

Joemat-Pettersson denied not doing enough to prevent recent farm workers' protests in sixteen Western Cape towns, including De Doorns.

"We have been working consistently with farm workers. We have been working in De Doorns for more than a year. I don't even think xenophobic attacks in De Doorns were captured that intensively in the media," she said.

She explained that farmers initially employed workers from Lesotho but then hired workers from Zimbabwe through labour brokers, causing tension.

"It was a melting pot, simmering and ready for an explosion," she said.

Joemat-Pettersson said South Africa still had a long way to go in agriculture as racism, sexual abuse and sexual oppression on farms was prevalent.

"If we are still pretending there is no crisis and blaming it on each other, saying it is a problem of national government or that this is a political problem.

"We are trying to ignore a fundamental situation which has been highlighted by so many different stakeholders and that is unfortunate," she added.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge

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