

Rural Safety and the Disbandment of the Commando Units in South Africa: A Challenge to Rural Communities and the African National Congress (ANC)?

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ABSTRACT The question of rural safety in South Africa has been a contested terrain for a number of years. In most cases, the safety crisis threatened the farmers and their labour force. In order to contain the situation, the commandos played a significant role of providing security to both the farmers and the farm workers. Although the commandos provided this security, in the main the structure was regarded as the National Party's (NPs) initiative. To the new African National Congress (ANC) as the ruling party after the April 1994 general elections where it got the majority votes, the organisation wanted to replace the commando units with another security force in the rural areas. However, this initiative was not welcomed by the farming communities who were mostly White. They viewed the disbandment and the replacement of the commandos as an attempt by the ANC's government to make them vulnerable for physical attacks, which in most cases led to deaths. Therefore, this study attempts to highlight the socio-political impact of this initiative to both the farmers and farming communities. The question of whether the commandos were to be retained or not in favour of rural safety had a huge socio-political impact and divided the South African rural communities.

INTRODUCTION

When the ANC came into power in 1994, one of the challenges that faced it was to improve the living conditions of the farm workers and to give the farm owners financial assistance. Although the ANC was destined to do that, the question of the commandos needed to be addressed. There were allegations that the commandos used to provide security only to the White farm owners and neglecting the farm workers. This triggered the ANC to critically scrutinize the alleged partial role the commandos played in its attempts to provide security.

Controversy over rural security in South Africa had deepened by the beginning of 2003. It was on 14 February 2003 when the former South African President Thabo Mbeki announced his government's intentions to disband the commandos. The commandos were accused of ill-treating the farm workers and only protecting the interests of the White farm owners. The study explores some of the key problems and challenges facing the rural communities and what the possible solutions could be in order to ensure rural safety and the sustainability of the agricultural community in South Africa. The study is designed to inform, encourage debate, identify problems and offer solutions on the most important issues facing rural communities. It is

argued in this study that the most important challenges faced by the farmers in South Africa currently revolve around two core issues, namely, rural safety and farm attacks. With the disbandment of the commandos, it is argued that rural safety became a challenge in South Africa. This had an impact on the socio-political well-being of the rural communities. Therefore, the study attempts to answer the following questions: What were the reasons for the disbandment of the commandos? How did the White farmers and organisations aligned to their plight respond to the proposal on the disbandment of the commandos? What was the impact of this disbandment on the general safety of rural communities in South Africa? Almost after a decade since the announcement of the disbandment of the commandos, why are there still reports of farm attacks?

This study on rural safety in South Africa is important because it deals with the challenges experienced not only by the ANC's government in addressing the problem, but also by the White farmers as well as the farm workers.

A Brief Historical Background on the Commando Units

The commando units go back to 1715 when part-time volunteer commandos were estab-

lished to safeguard the farming communities in the Cape. They were mobilised when required and cost less than full-time military units. Commandos were a product of the First Boer War during which fiercely independent boers (farmers) had no regular army. When danger threatened, all men in a district would form a militia organized into military units called commandos and would elect officers. Being civilian militia, each man wore what he wished, usually everyday neutral or khaki farming clothes such as jacket, trousers and slouch hat. Each man brought his own weapon, usually a hunting rifle, and his own horses. The average boer (farmer) citizens who made up their commandos were white farmers (Steinberg 2005: 1-3).

After the Anglo-Boer War and the declaration of peace in 1902, the commandos were disbanded but they thereafter, reformed themselves into clandestine 'shooting clubs'. In 1912, the commandos were reformed as an Active Citizen Force in the Urban Defence Force. The commandos had, in fact, occupied an awkward and ambivalent position in the ANC's government thinking ever since 1994. From its inception, the South African Defence Force (SADF) in the 1960s, assisted with day-to-day policing and was never meant to be a central function of the commandos. The commandos' primary function was then, and remained, one of rear defence during wartime. Rear area defence consisted of securing military communication and supply lines, guarding strategic civilian infrastructure, and protecting civilian life from enemy hostility in rural South Africa (Krinker s.a: 1-2) The most prominent secondary function conceived for the commandos was that of assisting state departments in times of crisis, be the crisis drought or floods, civil disorder, or the outbreak of an epidemic (Anon 2004: 1). Therefore, the early 1990s was a period of weakening and decline for the commandos. They hemorrhaged personnel copiously, partly because of the end of conscription, partly because many veteran members refused to work for the military under an ANC government. They also began to suffer under steady and incremental budget cuts, as South Africa's military spending in general began to decline.

Literature Review

For the purpose of this study, the authors reviewed, summarised, and critiqued a fairly large

body of literature dealing with rural safety and the disbandment of the commandos in South Africa. After a thorough scrutiny of the sources, the authors became convinced that the disbandment of the commandos amongst other factors should be viewed as only one factor which contributed to the escalation of farm attacks and the neglect of rural safety by the ANC's led government. Since 1997 inter-departmental security and intelligence committees, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and the South African Police Services (SAPS) Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) released reports based on available information about farm attacks and rural safety. The National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (NICOC) Report presented in December 1997 was also consulted. The National Operational Coordinating Committee (NOCOC) and the Crime Information Management Centre (CIMIC) shared some light on rural safety.

In analyzing the above mentioned reports and documents, the authors in this study came to the following conclusions: the overwhelming majority of farm attacks were attributed to criminal motives (robbery of guns, cash, cars, etc.) with some cases in which there were revenge motives; the majority of victims were middle aged and elderly, thus viewed as 'soft targets'; perpetrators usually operated in groups with some urban links whereas in some instances intelligence for the attacks were provided by employees or ex-employees, and there was evidence of planning taking place before the actual attacks; and there was also mention of isolated cases in which there were possible political motives. However, in general, the authors noted that there were also points of criticism about the reports used. For example, the statistical information contradicted the actual incidents. There was also a tendency to make ready generalisations without substantiation.

Several papers by researchers and academics also examined the causes of farm attacks and the prevention thereof. D Mistry of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) situated farm attacks in the broader economic context and made a number of useful recommendations concerning rural development which could be initiated by commercial farmers, business and government (Mistry 2003: 7-10). Relationships between farmers, and workers and other farm residents, were central to the report by academics R

Johnson and L Schlemmer. The Johnson and Schlemmer report was based on research, commissioned by the KwaZulu-Natal affiliate of Afri-SA in 1997/1998 on relationships between farmers and workers in the province (Johnson and Schlemmer 1998). M Schonteich and J Steinberg scrutinised the type of security measures to be implemented by the rural communities (2000: 30). In her MA dissertation, V Hornschuh (2007) provided an extensive analysis of farm attacks and the predicament faced by the farming communities in South Africa in as far as rural safety is concerned. All of the above mentioned sources proved critical for this study. However, it should be noted that such sources do not explicitly reflect the focus on the disbandment of the commandos and the impact thereof, rather concentrate on the general farms attacks experienced in South Africa after the coming into power by the ANC as the ruling party.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A variety of research designs were available to authors, however, the purpose of the study, the nature of the research question as well as the skills and resources at their disposal, usually determined the research strategy most suited to a particular study (Creswell 1998: 17-18; Durrheim 2004: 54). Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were found to be appropriate for this study. The qualitative research design is also referred to as field research and/or interpretative research. It is an anti-positivistic approach that is concerned with the qualities of human behaviour. It is focused more on understanding than on explaining behaviour. According to Fouche (2005: 276), phenomenology is directed at 'understanding and interpreting the essence of the meaning that subjects give to their daily lives'. Furthermore, Durrheim (2006: 47) argues that another characteristic of the quantitative approach is its holistic nature.

Besides the above-mentioned reasons for adopting the qualitative approach, there are also a number of advantages to using the quantitative approach. The quality of quantitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher. Generally useful and credible quantitative findings through observation, interview-

ing, and content analysis requires discipline, knowledge, training, practices, creativity and hard work (Patton 2002; Wolf 1986).

In view of the above, for the purpose of this study, secondary sources which include chapters in books and academic articles were consulted. Primary sources including conducting interview and consultation of the newspaper articles assisted in providing more answers to the questions on rural safety in South Africa. The use of interview provided new insights to the question of farm attacks in South Africa. Interviewees included politicians, government officials as well as some few farmers. Research reports on the topic under discussion were also consulted. A combination of all the above mentioned approached shared some light and provided debates on rural safety precautions in South Africa.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Motives and Support towards the Disbandment of the Commandos

The ANC's government crossed swords with the farmers when on 14 February 2003 former President Mbeki during his State of the Nation Address made an announcement that the commandos were to be disbanded. This triggered controversy over rural security in South Africa. This was interpreted by the farming communities in South Africa as an attempt by the ANC government to start driving the remaining white farmers off their land (*Citizen* 18 February 2003). Mbeki announced that the commandos would be phased out over a period of six years. According to him, the commandos would be replaced by a new system of specialised police unit (*Rapport* 16 February 2003). This new force was to be known as the Protection and Security Services Division. Ironically, he did not elaborate on how these specialised police unit would be constituted. A Strauss argues that the disbandment of the commandos implied that the responsibility of protection lay with government departments and parliament. It was obvious that the ANC's government saw the commandos as only a burden and protected the white farmers (Strauss 2005: 217).

The above announcement by Mbeki elicited sharp controversy and divergent views from both the ANC government (national and provincial)

and the farmers. The White farmers were shocked by Mbeki's announcement that the commandos would be disbanded and be replaced with a new rural police force. The farmers argued that government had been accused of leaving isolated white families in the agricultural hinterland vulnerable to violent crime, therefore, the commandos were helpful in this regard (Steinberg 2005: 1).

Mbeki stated during his address that the majority of the Black people on the farms were victims of serious crimes whilst the commandos were only interested in protecting the White farmers at the expense of the farm workers. Therefore, the introduction of the specialised police unit would help in protecting both the farmers and farm workers. Furthermore, he asserted that the disbandment of the commandos was necessary for the proper regulation of the security services and would coincide with the phasing in of the new system. Mbeki indicated that measures would be taken to ensure structures that within the six-year period of disbanding the commandos, they would be properly monitored (Twala 2010: 304).

It was not surprising to note that members of the ANC supported the issue of the disbandment of the commandos. For example, in a press conference held on 17 February 2003, Safety and Security Minister C Nqakula supported Mbeki's announcement. He alluded that the new force would be responsible inter alia with the following: guarding the country's borders and ports of entry against criminal activities and be accountable for safety in rural communities. Furthermore, he told the National Assembly (NA) on 6 March 2003 that the South African Police Services (SAPS) would extend its sector policing strategy to include rural areas (*The Star* 6 March 2003).

Justifying Mbeki's stance on the disbandment of the commandos, Nqakula pointed out that there were many cases of people reporting atrocities by commando members, thus compounding the need for its dissolution. He further declared that a rural safety plan was in place and he was awaiting a final report following an investigation into farm attacks in South Africa. However, Nqakula gave the assurance that there would be no security vacuum and that the plan was meant to release defence force members for the functions for which they were intended (Louw 2003: 6). According to Nqakula, the com-

mandos were to be disbanded because of the role they had played during the apartheid era. He argued that its role was that of apprehending freedom fighters who mainly belonged to the ANC. Although there were concerns about this issue, Nqakula stated that safety and rural protection programme for the rural communities was the priority of the ANC's government (*Business Day* 18 February 2003).

The above mentioned sentiments were also echoed by the then Defence Minister M Lekota who also described the commando units as 'apartheid-established' and said it had 'never been accepted as it ought to have been'. Like Nqakula, Lekota contended that it had been set up to deal with the infiltration of the ANC members who were declared illegal in South Africa by the apartheid government. Therefore, the operation of the commandos was mainly to curb this infiltration rather than providing rural security. It was clear that the post-apartheid South Africa under the rule of the ANC did not need such a structure. According to Lekota, the ANC's government was not targeting the commandos but aimed to reposition law enforcement units as it had when it changed the then murder and robbery unit to the violent and serious crimes unit (*Business Day* 20 February 2003).

Lekota identified the following three reasons as core factors for the disbandment of the commandos: Firstly, the government had to comply with provisions of the country's constitution, namely that the country needed to have a single policing agent. Secondly, the government had to provide more effective crime-combating capacity to the police service. Lastly, new crime combating units planned were to include a 'significant proportion' of current commandos, as well as new recruits from various communities (*The Star* 27 August 2003). It was clear from the above explanation that there was a vote of no confidence in the commando units by the ANC government. What mostly angered the commando members was the fact that they were not consulted by the ANC government before the announcement by Mbeki was made.

The above intention of disbanding the commandos was also supported by the then Police Commissioner J Selebi who stated the following on 3 June 2003 (*Business Day* 20 February 2003):

The commandos were established during the apartheid era and comprised mainly white vol-

unteers and therefore, no longer part of the force design of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). They were established to assist the police to fight crime and as the members of police are continuing to grow and with a reservist system, we do not need them. Members of the commandos are free to apply to join the reservists who will be given uniforms and training, and when they go out on duty, will operate under the command of a regular police officer.

It was interesting to note that former President N Mandela issued a statement in 1998 where he encouraged the White farmers to swell the ranks of commandos. It was clear from this that the ANC recognized the commandos as part and parcel of its rural safety plan. Ironically, in 2003 Mandela's successor announced the disbandment of this unit.

Arguments against the Disbandment of the Commandos

There was a great deal of dissatisfaction about the question of the disbandment of the commandos and its socio-ecological challenge thereof. Both the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the New National Party (NNP) which disregarded its new partnership with the ANC defended the commandos. Rural safety and protection became the main reason for the retention of the commandos. DA rural safety spokesperson A Botha urged the ANC government to thoroughly canvass the opinion of rural communities before implementing the disbandment. He argued (The Star 17 February 2003):

Phasing out the commando system before an effective alternative is in place just does not make any sense. This announcement by the President will definitely send a very negative message to rural communities ... There were isolated cases of rightwing extremists abusing the system, but this was because officers were not properly screened and the SANDF neglected the commandos.

The White farmers in the majority advanced the argument that the commandos were an integral part of rural security, while farm workers and a section of the police officials claimed that the commandos were persistent in perpetrating abuses of human rights. The allegations of rights abuses played a significant role in the ANC government's decision to disband them. These

allegations, however, were disputed by the Agriculture South Africa chairperson K Ferreira who asserted that if the government disbanded the commandos, incidents of violent crime on farms and the farm attacks would increase. He concluded that commandos were a very important structure in combating not only farm attacks but also general crime prevention in the rural areas (Mail and Guardian 27 February 2003).

In a telephonic interview with Ferreira, he stated (Ferreira 2009: 11 September):

The whole question of the disbandment of the Commandos is politically motivated. I think the people who are against the Commandos hardly know their important in providing security for both the farmers and farm workers.

SW Swanepoel opined (Personal Collection: Interview with SW Swanepoel, 15 June 2012):

The ANC did not consult us when it decided on the disbandment of the commandos. The White farmers are the people affected by this. After this disbandment, the government failed to provide us with adequate security, hence the escalation of farm attacks in South Africa. This problem cannot be solved without our involvement as the farmers.

The NNP defence spokesperson A Blaas said the move to disband the commandos could well compromise the defence capabilities of the ANC's government. He further stated (The Citizen 16 February 2003):

In defence planning the commando's form part of the Reserve Force earmarked for rapid force expansion in case of a threat against the Republic. They are tasked for rear defence and trained, amongst other tasks, to do this. Phasing-out the commandos and replacing them with local security units will result in the rear area defence capability being abandoned. The decision to phase-out the commandos stems from a historical perspective and the fact that in isolated cases, right wing extremists abused the system.

The Socio-ecological Impact of the Disbandment of the Commandos on Rural Safety

Statistics showed that the agricultural communities were facing a threat to safety on a number of different fronts, but the ANC's government response had been slow and ineffective.

The situation had been allowed to continue unabated and without proper attention. With the disbandment of the commandos, the following were highlighted by individuals as well as organisations as socio-ecological challenges to the rural communities:

The Failure of the Rural Protection Plan (RPP)

Although a rural safety plan was introduced as early as 1997 with the view to encouraging all role players concerned with rural safety to work in a coordinated manner, and engage in joint planning, action and monitoring to combat crime in rural areas, farm attacks continued as there were weaknesses in the Rural Protection Plan (RPP). Studies on the effectiveness of this plan came to the following conclusions: RPP effectiveness to combat attacks on farms and smallholdings varied from area to area. Where farms were spread apart, the plan's effectiveness was heavily reliant on strong civilian protection; in the event of a farm attack, it was normally only the victim's neighbours who could respond rapidly enough to apprehend culprits and by the time security forces arrived on the scene, most culprits had fled; due to limitations in the rapid response capability in the country's rural areas, it was crucial that farmers and smallholders themselves, through the commando system or the South African Police Services (SAPS) reservist system take greater responsibility for rural safety; there was a lack of detective and intelligence functions in the RPP. When attackers were from outside the area of attack, detective rates were low. Therefore, there was an urgent need for greater inter-regional and inter-provincial cooperation (Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Farm Attacks 31 July 2003: 281-291).

In this study, the authors observed that on the face of it concerning the RPP, there was a large area of common interest between farm workers and farmers with regard to the prevention and provision of safety measures to the rural communities. In the main, the farmers complained of the encroachment of predatory strangers on their farm lands. Given the high rates of stock theft and farm murders, it appeared that farm workers also had a powerful interest in detecting and reporting the presence of strangers on farms. Bringing workers into understand-

ing the RPP was fraught with difficulties. For example, a farmer was unlikely to accept the presence in the plan of a workforce he believed was harbouring families who did not provide labour, and were perhaps committing intermittent stock theft. A working family, in turn, who believed that it could face eviction at any moment, was also unlikely to be a reliable source of information where farmers' interests were at stake. It was therefore important for the commandos to be retained in order to continue providing services.

The Escalation of Farm Attacks and Threat to Rural Security

The farming communities had been plagued by farm attacks for many years in South Africa. Farm attacks were 6 122 between 1991 and 2001, resulting in 1 254 people being killed. During 2001 there were 1 011 farm attacks and 147 or 10.5% were killed, and 484 or 34.6% of the victims were injured. About 12.3% of the female victims were raped. However, it should be noted that 71% of all rape victims were Black people. The attackers used firearms in 63.8% of the incidents in 2001. A variety of other weapons were also used, although in 11.7% of the cases the attackers were actually unarmed (Statistic on Farm Attacks by TAU-SA 2001-2011: 1-2). Therefore, it was unwise for the ANC's government to contemplate the disbandment of the commandos if the situation was bad as shown above.

According to the Transvaal Agricultural Union (TAU)-SA, the SAPS either did not keep records of farm attacks and/or farm murders, or were unwilling to divulge information because that would point to the necessity of keeping the commando units. Underneath is a reflection of the statistics as provided by TAU-SA over the period 2001 to 2011: in 2001 (141 attacks and 79 murders); 2002 (228 attacks and 118 murders); 2003 (165 attacks and 89 murders); 2004 (115 attacks and 114 murders); 2005 (79 attacks and 56 murders); 2006 (81 attacks and 45 murders); 2007 (94 attacks and 60 murders); 2008 (183 attacks and 78 murders); 2009 (151 attacks and 70 murders); 2010 (110 attacks and 65 murders); and 2011 (42 attacks and 25 murders by mid-year) (Statistic on Farm Attacks by TAU-SA 2001-2011: 1-2).

Due to the above complicated problems of farm attacks, the farming communities called

on the Minister of Safety and Security to take steps in addressing this problem. This necessitated the Commissioner of Police to appoint the Committee of Inquiry into farm attacks. Members of the Committee of Inquiry were Adv. CF du Plessis, Ms MEA de Haas (senior lecturer at the University of Natal), Ms J Dhlamini (senior researcher at Technikon South Africa), Ms D Mistry (senior researcher at Technikon South Africa), Prof. CJ Moolman (University of the North), Mr L Rasegatla (Secretary for Safety and Security), Adv. M Schonteich (senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies) and Ms HC van Wijk (traumatologist at the Rand Afrikaans University). The terms of reference of the Committee were to inquire into the ongoing spate of attacks on farms, which included violent criminal acts such as murder, robbery, rape, etc., and to determine the motives and factors behind these attacks and make recommendations on their findings.

The Committee interviewed a total of 51 people in Gauteng, North West, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga Provinces. The 51 people interviewed included 36 victims. The victims included those who survived the attacks, 28 other people closely connected with them and also some 'outsiders' with no direct connection with the victims but had knowledge of the incidents. In its findings the Committee came up with the following: 56% incidents took place during weekends, often on Sundays. In most incidents 72% the victims were confronted and surprised by the attackers inside their homes or on their properties (Report of the Committee 2001: 424-425).

In view of the above cases, the Institute for Security Studies Director J Cilliers cautioned against any plan to abolish commandos before effective alternatives was in place. He stated that despite their criticisms, the commandos have traditionally been functioning as a blanket of support in rural safety. The President of Agri-South Africa (Agri-SA), J Grobler argued that the disbandment of the commandos would create problems in as far as rural safety was concerned. According to him, the commandos played a significant role in the rural safety plan. Addressing the media he stated: 'In phasing them out, while experience has shown how difficult they are to replace, will be negative for safety and for the country. It's the old story of hundreds of plans being hatched while crime

continues unabated' (*The Citizen* 15 February 2003).

Many farmers, and some representatives of agricultural unions, believed that the attacks were 'explicitly racial or political', and aimed at driving farmers off their land. Reference was made to the attacks on farmers by the Azanian Peoples' Liberation Army (APLA) members (Jeffery 2009: 363-364). In some cases APLA was accused of sending various types of threats to the farmers and this included: anonymous telephone calls and sending letters to them instructing them to vacate the farms or face the consequences (Manby 2002: 86-104).

Possible Causes of Food and Job Security Crisis

The slow response and the failure of the ANC's government in addressing the problem of rural safety could lead the country in facing a potential crippling food and job security crisis. Due to crimes committed in the rural areas, thousands of farm workers face a problem of unemployment as the farmers leave their farms for better and secured residential areas. In March 2012 C van Zyl, assistant general manager of the TAU-SA noted that a commercial farmer supplies food for 1 600 people on average and, if attacked, a farm can lie fallow for 8 to 10 years (Sowetan 13 March 2012). This situation could threaten food security and job creation.

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), 11.8 million people were employed in the formal and informal sectors in South Africa in 2001. Of these, almost 1.4 million or 11.8% were employed in the agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing sector. Of these 700 000 were employed in the formal sector and 653 000 in the informal sector. Interestingly, between 1996 and 2001 almost 600 000 jobs were created in the broad agricultural sector (formal and informal) (Report of the Committee 2001: 434).

The Declining Relationships between the Farmers and the Farm Workers

The subject of relationships between farmers and workers periodically received attention over the years, specifically in connection with its possible relationship with attacks carried out against farmers. B Manby compiled a report for the American Human Rights Watch (HRW)

which monitored human rights all over the world. The focus of Manby's report was primarily on abuses suffered by people living and working on farms, including at the hands of owners or managers of farms, and the failure of the ANC's government to deal with such abuse in an even-handed manner. The report stated that crimes against black farm workers were not pursued with the same determination as those against white farmers (Manby 2001: 2-3). Therefore, what was called the Rural Safety Plan which included the formation of security cells had increased insecurity amongst black people living on and around farms. The Plan failed to respond to crimes committed against Blacks, including those perpetrated by farmers against workers (Manby 2002: 86-104).

A multiple factors were advanced as reasons for the decline in the relationship between these groupings. One of the reasons was the question of ill-treatment by the farmers. In an exclusive interview with H Ramokhosi, he stated (Personal Collection: Interview with H Ramokhosi, 10 May 2010):

Some of the farmers used to ill-treat us. Sometimes we would work and towards the end of the month, instead of getting our wages, the farmer decides on expelling us or calling the police and be charged on trespass. Such incidents led to farm attacks, whereby people retaliated. In order for all of us to live in a safe environment, the farm owners should respect the farm workers. Sometimes these farmers would accuse us of stealing livestock. In most cases, such allegation came when we were supposed to be paid.

Likewise the farmers also had problems with the farm workers. One factor which caused unease among farmers during the period under discussion was land-related legislation, in the form of the Labour Tenants Act of 1996, which granted second generation labour tenants the right to purchase land and housing on the farm where they worked. Many farmers feared division of their farms, and a loss of control over farm security. At the same time, labour legislation made it difficult to cut back on labour, especially given that the enactment of the Extension of Security of Tenure Act (known as ESTA) in 1997 made evictions from farms difficult.

Johnson and Schlemmer stated that many cases of assault on farm workers and residents

were not reported to the police for various reasons, such as the distance of the farm from the nearest police station, a perceived close relationship between farmers and police and fear of job loss. In a number of cases, farm workers attempted to report abuse, but the police would refuse to open dockets (Johnson and Schlemmer 1998: 69). There was a general lack of confidence to the police by both the farmers and farm workers.

Research conducted between 2001 and 2003 by the Human Rights Commission found that human rights violations were prevalent in most of the South African farms. It established that the 'tot' and 'dop' system, where workers were paid with alcohol was continuing and the practice contributed to social ills. The Commission also found that illegal evictions were still being carried out by the farmers. In some cases, farmers set their dogs on their employees if deemed unwanted (*The Star* 3 September 2003).

The Establishments of the Farm Watch Organisations

It was interesting to note that rural safety was to a certain extent taken seriously by the rural communities prior and after the disbandment of the commandos. For example, an Ixopo Farm Watch, later re-named Ixopo Community Watch was established in 1997. By 2002, it was operating in four contiguous policing districts, namely, Ixopo, Creighton, Donnybrook and Highflats. Financed by local farmers and timber companies it had nine full time employees and some of them being former police members. After the murder of the two farmers, soldiers including the Umkomaas commando were deployed and they patrolled the greater Ixopo area regularly. Although these attempts were valuable to provide rural safety, there were criticisms leveled against the farm watch organisation by some rural community members. Some of the criticisms were that these organisations assaulted the farm workers and that raids were conducted by the organisations without the knowledge of the workers.

CONCLUSION

With the disbandment of the commando units, rural safety was compromised. Although the ANC's government launched two initiatives

in respect rural safety, namely, Area Crime Combating Units and Sector Policing, the successes were limited. This was due to the fact that there was lack of commitment from the police personnel in as far as rural policing was concerned. The article shows that combating rural crime must be given a high priority. Land owners, farmers and farm dwellers are entitled to a safe living environment and other fundamental freedoms, just as any other citizen. However, it is clear that rural safety depends to a considerable extent on the effectiveness of sector policing and the factors driving up crime risk in particular areas. Although the large number of farm attacks has been dwarfed by the number of violent crimes committed in urban areas, the prioritization of rural safety is needed.

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