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'Goodwill' White Farmers Can Keep Land, Says Zimbabwe Government

By Itayi Garande

Only white farmers who have shown goodwill to President Robert Mugabe's government will be allowed to keep their farms, Zimbabwe's security minister was quoted as saying on Tuesday.

"Zimbabwe's security forces have been directed to identify white farmers who have shown goodwill towards the government so that they can retain some land," Didymus Mutasa told the official Herald newspaper.

Hundreds of white farmers have been chased off farms since Mugabe launched a controversial programme of land redistribution nearly seven years ago.

The programme sparked condemnation from some Western nations.

Commercial agricultural production dropped sharply by more than 40%, leaving the former breadbasket nation forced to import food.

Mugabe (82) was, however, strengthened by support from African and Asian nations. He blames Zimbabwe's agricultural and economic problems on drought and Western sanctions.

Less than 600 white farmers live on farms today, out of more than 4,000 in 2000.

Those on their farms were given a spark of hope last year when the authorities said they would hand out land leases to some white former landowners.

Mutasa, a close confidante of Mugabe, said white farmers must have consistently shown goodwill towards the government to be allowed to keep some land.

White farmers are frequently asked to contribute food and money to ruling party functions and provide equipment and services to new black farmers.

"We are taking land from whites and giving it to landless blacks, but we are also in the process of identifying white farmers so that they can retain some land or be allocated a portion of the land," the security minister said.

"We know those white farmers whom we have been working with and our security forces would also assist us in this regard to identify white farmers who should remain. They should not want to seek goodwill today," he added.

Reports say up to 15 white farmers in the southern Chiredzi area have been served eviction

notices in recent days.

A farming spokesperson said earlier this month that white farmers were living through an enormously anxious time.

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