

Politics of land compensation in Zimbabwe and political correctness – Understanding the “Malema factor”

Recent developments in developments in which Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa signed a USD 3.5 billion compensation deal with the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) have provoked a lot of controversy.

Under the deal, which was christened the Global Compensation Deed (GCD), an agreement was made to “pay for improvements” made on the farms prior to the land reform exercise, which sought to address the historically built land imbalances that saw 4000 whites owning the bulk of the productive land in Zimbabwe at the expense of the indigenous people.

Some of the improvements cited in the compensation agreement include land clearance, drainage, irrigation trenching, fencing, dams and boreholes as well as buildings which had been made on the land.

While asserting that the land reform exercise was “irreversible”, the pro-government daily, *The Herald*, described the agreement as a “milestone” [“demonstrating the Second Republic's commitment to re-engagement and constitutionalism”](#). Considering the gravity of the matter, this is simply the typical nebulous political rhetoric.

For a country that underwent a bruising liberation war characterised by bloodshed and having to face the harsh reality of an intransigent white minority backed by Western capitals who had vested interest, it is saddening that Zimbabwe has taken this route; no wonder it has received much condemnation.

This development is a travesty of justice, considering how the Zimbabwean government, which dared to lecture every listener about its take on “rule of law” on the land question, now prides itself on reversing its own gains.

This ugly development explains why the Kenyan academic and public intellectual Prof. PLO Lumumba opined that the decision to compensate white farmers [“defeats logic and reason”](#), further calling them unfair and unjust. He thinks that the development amounts to giving bad precedence to other African countries, especially to Namibia and South Africa, who still grapple with addressing the same historical problems.

To Lumumba, Mnangagwa’s decision is akin to a “former slave” compensating a “former coloniser”.

Closer to home in South Africa, Julius Malema, the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) described the compensation deal as a [“treasonous”](#) act seeking to [“please the West”](#).

It was not long before the Zimbabwean embassy in Pretoria quickly responded to the EFF’s [“pretentiousness”](#) to know more about the [“history and politics of Zimbabwe than the Zimbabweans themselves.”](#)

The EFF launched a veiled attack on Zimbabwe’s ambassador to South Africa Mr David Hamadziripi and further got support from the former Democratic Alliance (D.A) leader Mmusi Maimane who also wrote to South Africa’s International Relations Minister Naledi Pandor expressing concerns about the [“human rights abuses”](#) in Zimbabwe, which seemed like escalating a tiff which had originated from heavy reservations over the compensation deal.

Although the EFF is not the ruling party of South Africa, its voice and contributions to the existing bilateral relations between Harare and Pretoria should not be downplayed, even beyond the land issue. The very fact that two ruling parties are now being brought to the table, owing to the land question

and other developments, speaks volumes about Malema's latitude of power in both countries.

Malema's EFF is simply agitated over Zimbabwe's act of reversing its historic land reform exercise, which had provided a manual for South Africa and Namibia, on how to address the land question in the specific circumstances of those respective nations.

Although Zimbabwe and South Africa will be utilising diplomatic channels to formally engage following Malema's criticism, there is not much which deliberations will deliver, given the undying land question affecting the two countries, albeit differently.

In Malema's worldview, it is a travesty of justice that South Africa, which attained a majority rule in 1994, continues to face problems in addressing grievances on land ownership, which were central to the anti-apartheid movement.

Although the two parties will likely come out of the discussions exuding optimism and dispelling the remarks by the EFF, there are fundamental internal issues about the land question, which will require to be solved at the end of the day.

Malema also sees the internal succession plan which the ANC has had from Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and currently Cyril Ramaphosa without any tangible shift in addressing the land question, which is now being reversed on account of Mnangagwa's compensation deal in neighbouring Zimbabwe.

These are the existing contradictions irking Malema, despite the fact that the reclamation of the land is a genuine historical grievance.

Although Malema's pertinent points are valid for both Zimbabwe and South Africa, as evidenced even by the resort to

diplomatic engagements between the two countries, his proposals to have the land owned by the Boers expropriated faces difficulties.

However, Malema faces a complex environment which is littered with double standards of heavy demands for “political correctness” on the part of Africans, in their attempt to address a problem of historic alienation which arose out of violence, murder, plunder and dispossession.

It is that world order, which never demanded the same from unrelenting colonialists and their backers, even after years of attaining independence.

That is the problem which Zimbabwe, South Africa and perhaps Namibia shall continue to face – solving the land question within the expected confines of democracy, upholding human and property rights.

When Mnangagwa came talking about a “new dispensation” which sought to “break from the Mugabe past”, he was subscribing to the ideals of political correctness. This was surprising considering that Zimbabwe had become accustomed to Mugabe’s entrenched positions including on the land question which had drawn much support from the colonised people while of course rattling the imperial metropolis.

Although it is expected that some solutions might emerge from the ongoing discussions between Ramaphosa and Mnangagwa, there is a huge reminder about how poorly the two men had addressed previous similar circumstances requiring decisive political actions.

Ramaphosa faces a similar problem of continuing to address the land issue in his own country, albeit within a “morally appropriate” manner which does not challenge white supremacy interests in the Republic of South Africa, touted as the Rainbow Nation.

Diplomacy between the two countries will only provide a platform to reaffirm the camaraderie between South Africa and Zimbabwe, whose ruling parties are outgrowths of former liberation movements.

It is this world which has tended to call Malema a “firebrand leader” for daring to speak about the need to address the means of production and livelihood of an indigenous people.

Whenever Malema has spoken about his views on the land, he has simply been reminded time and again about the need to avoid “becoming another Zimbabwe”.

Robert Mugabe, whom Malema idolises, faced that problem of being criticised for his stance on the land question. But now with the news of compensation against the white farmers, Zimbabweans are now looking at the past with envy.

It is this problem of political correctness and a lack of self-belief which have led Mnangagwa to compensate white farmers on the technical veneer of paying for improvements on the land, which of course was done out of illegality.

In the end, Malema and his EFF have torched a diplomatic spat between two countries who will come out of the discussions with the usual optimism and resilience.

However, Malema’s power tag in the scheme of things cannot be wished away, given the desire to address the land question in the African countries.