

## Chapter 3 The rural safety summit

The seriousness of continued violent attacks against the farming community in South Africa and the urgency of confronting the issue led the former president, Nelson Mandela, to convene a rural safety summit to formulate a comprehensive strategy to deal with the problem.

The summit, which took place on 10 October 1998, aimed at achieving consensus around a future process to deal with the issue of attacks against farms and smallholdings, as well as more general issues of rural insecurity. The summit also aimed at strengthening existing strategies to deal with rural crime, as well as the development of further action plans.

In the run-up to the summit, an attempt was made not only to include as many roleplayers as possible in the process, but also to get some agreement around a draft declaration. These were presented to participants at the summit and debated in some detail. Amendments to the declaration were made and a final declaration was adopted. A summary of the declaration follows below.

### **Rural safety summit declaration**

- I We from all sectors of the farming and rural community, and government and business, unconditionally condemn the spate of senseless killings and other forms of criminal activity affecting farming and rural communities. We are collectively determined to bring an end to these crimes.
- II We recognise that the causes of attacks on farming and rural communities specifically, and the cause of rural crime more generally, are complex and multi-faceted. The summit therefore recognises that a security approach alone will not solve the problem of crime in the rural areas in the longer term. Thorough research into the probable causes and motives needs to be completed in order to develop proper preventative strategies.

- III Of immediate importance in curbing attacks on the farming and rural community is effective law enforcement. The summit accepts that the rural protection plan should be utilised as the operational strategy to combat and prevent violent crimes against farming and rural communities. All legitimate private sector initiatives aimed at protecting the farming and rural communities should be incorporated within the framework of the rural protection plan and its structures.
- IV We agree that all initiatives to ensure greater safety and security, in particular the rural protection plan, need to be more inclusive of all people in the farming and rural communities by *inter alia* strengthening and expanding the commandos and police reservists so that they become more accessible to the whole rural community.
- V The summit is of the view that organised agriculture, agri-business, non-governmental organisations and community organisations, government and other relevant roleplayers must co-operate where possible and appropriate in mobilising resources to meet the identified needs aimed at enhancing rural safety.
- VI Government commits itself to continued improvements including adequate funding and harmonisation in the operation and functioning of the criminal justice system to ensure an effective system of deterrence in rural areas.
- VII The summit recognises that clarity is required in relation to a number of legal issues, especially with regards to the rights of victims and potential victims in the farming and rural community.
- VIII Given the range of causal factors and motives contributing to attacks on the farming community, it is recognised that an ongoing process of information collection and analysis must be conducted. Well analysed information has to be gathered to assist with the planning of both preventative and law enforcement responses, as well as countering perceptions as to the causes of attacks on the farming and rural community. The causes for attacks on farms and smallholdings should be more scientifically researched by *inter alia* academic institutions.
- IX We recognise that, to ensure long-term safety in rural and farming communities, a sustained focus is required. We therefore commit ourselves as roleplayers both in and outside of government to collaborate with the department for safety and security in the development of a long-term policy framework for rural safety and security. This framework will include the determining of overall capacity and resource needs, as well as the roles and responsibilities of a range of

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government departments and other roleplayers in ensuring safer rural communities.

- X The spiritual leaders of the nation need to unite in humility and prayer to revive the moral values and standards which will again condemn lawlessness of all kind, create social pressure against criminality and reward decency.

### **Rural safety task team**

After the summit, the rural safety task team constituted itself from the original parties who had contributed towards organising the summit. The task team has to give effect to the resolutions adopted at the summit. Three task team working groups were formed.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Working group 1: Communication, information and research*

This working group is responsible for ensuring that all parties to the summit refrain from inflammatory statements, while communicating a single series of messages to the public. The group is also responsible for initiating research in relation to rural safety and security, and co-ordinating the collection and collation of information and statistics relating to incidents of attacks on farms and smallholdings.

#### *Working group 2: Operational interventions (rural protection plan)*

Improvements to the rural protection plan as suggested by the summit are considered and implemented within this working group. This is done by, *inter alia*, recruiting people from all communities into the police's reservist structures and the army's commando system. Some effort has also gone into improving intelligence collection in an attempt to pre-empt attacks on farms and smallholdings. Specific operations are also co-ordinated through this working group.<sup>2</sup> In essence, the working group constitutes those operational roleplayers engaged in rural protection duties under the NOCOC.

#### *Working group 3: Rural safety policy*

Issues that require longer term policy development fall under the auspices of (or are at least co-ordinated by) this working group. Specifically, the focus is on the development of a longer term policy for rural safety which includes inputs from across the spectrum of interested roleplayers.

### **Notes**

1 See M Shaw, A grim harvest: Countering attacks on farms and smallholdings, *Crime & Conflict* 15, August 1999, pp 5-8.

- 2 For example, Operation Octopus in Vaalrand (Gauteng) in March 1999 involved co-operation between the SAPS and the SANDF, and included visibility operations, vehicle control points, search operations and farm visits.