

Press Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations

The power of ideas

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David Cameron misinformed on South Africa, promotes dangerous complacency on EWC – IRR

Former UK Prime Minister David Cameron is misinformed in his views about South Africa's land politics. To infer, as he does, that critics of the current policy trajectory are ignorant and should have faith in President Ramaphosa is in effect to call for complacency when vigilance is required.

Speaking while in South Africa for a corporate event, Mr Cameron said that critics should 'listen to what the president is saying, not what is said on Twitter'.

Mr Cameron would be well advised to recognise that what is at issue here is not land reform, but the unambiguously stated intention of the ruling party to introduce a policy of expropriation without compensation (EWC). This has been repeatedly endorsed by President Ramaphosa.

We have monitored land and property rights policy closely for years. Since 2007, we have identified in excess of 30 measures – legislative and regulatory – that would constrict private property rights and expand state discretion. The move to EWC is arguably the most extreme example.

The impact on the economy of this becoming policy would be profound indeed. We engage with business, both local and foreign, on an ongoing basis, and the sense that this increases the risks of doing business in South Africa is palpable. Some have said that it could make South Africa uninvestable – and these are not limited to firms in the agricultural sector.

That President Ramaphosa publicly committed himself and his party to changing the constitution – a provision in the Bill of Rights, in fact – before the official public participation process had even been completed only adds to these concerns. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that most South Africans are not in favour of such a change, or of EWC, but their views seem to be ignored.

EWC does not, in any event, address any of the real problems besetting land reform.

At a time when South Africa desperately needs economic growth, investment and the resulting job creation, introducing a measure as counterproductive as EWC would be an act of extreme folly. To follow Mr Cameron's implicit advice, and accept the non-binding (and implausible) assurances being offered, would be a seminal mistake. It would be a dereliction of citizenship.

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