

Zimbabwe farmer Martin Grobler evicted weeks after compensation deal

The Times (UK) by Jane Flanagan, Africa Correspondent

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A commercial farmer has been evicted from his land in Zimbabwe six weeks after the government announced a “historic” deal with dispossessed white landowners.

Martin Grobler, 63, and his wife Debbie were given hours to vacate their home by the new owner, an official from the lands ministry, who arrived with a sheriff, a court order and a lorry full of police. The fate of the couple’s 120 employees, planted fields and 250 head of cattle were thrown into doubt by the eviction which came as a “total shock”, Mr Grobler said.



A lorry full of police arrived to order Martin Grobler off his land

He had felt “more secure” since President Mnangagwa hailed a US\$3.5 billion compensation package signed with farmers’ leaders in late July as “a symbol of our commitment to constitutionalism, the respect of the rule of law and property rights”.

The new ‘owner’ of Protea Valley Farm has been named as Ivy Rupindi, an official at the lands ministry, who was given an “offer letter” for the property some years ago. Dewa Mavhinga, from Human Rights Watch, said local reports suggested Ms Rupindi was connected to the president “and has claimed she is his daughter”. Certainly, the deployment of large numbers of police and a sheriff “suggested she is very well connected”.

Mr Grobler, the third generation of his family to work Zimbabwe’s land, told The Times that he and his wife “are now pretty much at the mercy of everybody’s favours. We are most concerned about our staff who have been left in shock and fear.” They were planning to plant 120 acres of maize and transplant 120 acres of tobacco seedlings this week, he added.

They had rented the Farm, 25 miles from Harare, since they were among 4,500 white farmers evicted under Robert Mugabe’s chaotic land redistribution policy which began in 2000. Shortly after ousting Mr Mugabe in late 2017, Mr Mnangagwa said he wanted white farmers to return to their land, which has mostly been left fallow.

In a statement, the government said it was “aware” of the eviction, but was “trying to establish the facts behind the matter”. Tendai Biti, a senior opposition MP, said it was “a typical tactic” of Mr Mnangagwa’s government to distance itself from actions that associate it with the Mugabe-stye lawlessness it had vowed to end.

“To invade a productive farm only a few weeks after they attempt to fool the world with the compensation announcement demonstrates the truth behind this bandit regime’s claim that it is ‘open for business’,” said Mr Biti, who served as finance minister in a unity government under Mr Mugabe.

Since the country’s coffers are empty, the cash needed for the compensation deal would be raised in 30-year bonds on the international market, the compensation agreement said. Half the sum would be distributed within a year, the rest paid out in the next four.

Recompense is not for any land or movable assets such as farm equipment, but only for “improvements” and buildings.

Andy Pascoe, head of the Commercial Farmers Union, who had welcomed the agreement he signed with Mr Mnangagwa as “a miracle”, said the eviction of the Groblers resulted from enforcement of a court order issued last year. “Similar cases have been brought to our attention and we have been able to take action to resolve them before eviction orders were enforced,” he said.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/world/zimbabwe-farmer-martin-grobler-evicted-weeks-after-compensation-deal-8fxv5wz5>

Additional photo:



[Photo added from the Internet: Commercial farmer Martin Grobler’s possessions are scattered hurriedly over his lawn after being given 24 hours notice to vacate his farm by an official from the lands ministry, Ivy Rupindi, who is claiming his farm]