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MEDIA STATEMENT

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ADDRESSING AND REDRESSING COLONIAL INJUSTICE

This year marks 111 years since the Natives Land Act of 1913 was introduced in South Africa. This Act significantly impacted the country's socioeconomic landscape by drastically restricting African land ownership, while allocating the majority of the land to White settlers. This legislation led to the forced eviction of Africans from their ancestral lands, pushing them into servitude and making cheap labour the norm. The Act entrenched racial segregation, presenting Whites as superior to Blacks, a perception that has had lasting effects on our society.

This historical context underscores the importance of our current efforts in land restitution. The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), through the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR), remains dedicated to addressing the injustices of the past and accelerating the resolution of land claims.

Since the inception of the land restitution process, significant progress has been made. From 1998 to 2024, the CRLR has settled a total of 83 205 land claims lodged during the initial lodgement period. These claims represent historically dispossessed individuals and communities across the country.

The CRLR has been actively handing over title deeds and providing financial compensation to claimants in all provinces, with the majority of these claims in Western Cape (17 488), Eastern Cape (17 258), KwaZulu-Natal (16 179), Gauteng (13 271), Limpopo (4 834), Northern Cape (4 069), North West (3 981), Mpumalanga (3 450) and Free State (2 675).

DALRRD has invested nearly R58 billion in settled land claims, grants and financial compensation up until 31 March 2024. This includes R26,4 billion spent on land, R26 billion on financial compensation, and R5,4 billion on grants. Through this restitution process, a total of 376 976 individuals and communities have benefited, with 3,895 935 ha of land returned to beneficiaries, including over 1 270 people living with disabilities who have received land or financial compensation.

DALRRD acknowledges land claimants' concerns about the time it takes to finalise their claims. In response, the department has intensified efforts to reduce the backlog. In 2019, the CRLR launched Project Kuyasa, meaning "the sun is rising" in isiZulu, aimed at revitalising the organisation for



greater effectiveness. This initiative focuses on enhancing turnaround times, streamlining processes, implementing efficient systems, optimising office operations, and elevating customer service standards. The objectives of Project Kuyasa include reducing backlog claims, improving business processes and systems, developing enhanced financial and settlement models and implementing a strategy for people and change management. These efforts ensure that the CRLR can address land claims with renewed vigour and efficiency.

The legacy of the socioeconomic injustices, which was inherited from the Natives Land Act of 1913, continues to haunt the majority of Black South Africans. The land dispossession of South Africa's indigenous people under this Act has caused poverty, which is still prevalent in our country today.

As we commemorate the Natives Land Act, it is essential to address the legal complexities surrounding the processing of new order claims lodged between 2014 and 2016. Due to the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act, 2014 (Act No. 15 of 2014), which was found invalid by the Constitutional Court in 2016, the CRLR is currently unable to process these claims. The court recognised the validity of claims lodged during this period but prohibited their processing until all outstanding old order claims lodged before December 1998 are resolved or until new legislation is introduced. DALRRD and the commission remains steadfast in its mission and will continue to inform them of any developments through appropriate media channels. As we move forward, we do so with a commitment to justice, equity and the continued restoration of dignity to those affected by the historical injustices of land dispossession.

Many South Africans, especially Black South Africans, are trapped in a cycle of poverty that emerged as a result of our history of colonialism and apartheid. Over a hundred years has passed since this inhumane tragedy unfolded, but still the scars remain, and the legacy endures. DALRRD is striving to finalise the outstanding land claims by accelerating its efforts in an endeavour to redress the injustices of the past.

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