

STATEMENT BY MR ANDRÉ FOURIE MP, MINISTER OF REGIONAL AND LAND AFFAIRS, TO A PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE MULTIPARTY NEGOTIATION COUNCIL WITH REGARD TO THE SITUATION IN LEBOWA

The current situation in Lebowa is a direct consequence of the lack of co-operation from the Government of Lebowa in the effort to normalise that territory's financial administration. Certain groupings are also actively abusing this process in order to further their own political ends by means of intimidation and cheap propaganda.

I wish to reiterate - the level of co-operation of the Lebowa Government and its officials primarily will determine when and how soon the situation in Lebowa is normalised.

This lack of co-operation directly contributed to the fact that some of Lebowa's labourers still haven't received their wages. Due to the fact that they are on separate departmental payrolls, it was not possible to process their wages with the salaries at the computer centre. The various Lebowa government departments were requested some time ago to submit the names of labourers that are still to be paid. As soon as these lists are presented by the relevant departments, outstanding wages will be processed. The officials on strike in Lebowa are thus actively preventing the speedy correction of their fellow workers' wages.

Furthermore, allegations were made that 15 officials of the Lebowa Government were dismissed by the task team. This is patently untrue. No Lebowa official was dismissed. Fourteen officials of the Department of Works were put on indefinite leave after threatening the task team with violence, intimidating their fellow workers and threatening to destroy proof of claims submitted by Lebowa's suppliers.

In addition, one official at Lebowakgomo's computer centre was put on indefinite leave after continuously disrupting the work being done there. This official had no function at the computer centre, as the functions for which she was responsible, were transferred to other departments.

The 14 abovementioned officials actively disrupted the processing of claims on the pretext that white suppliers' claims receive preferential treatment, while the salaries of black officials are neglected. I reject with utter contempt these false and racist allegations. My officials, with the assistance of officials of the Lebowa Government, worked night and day in order to pay the September salaries of Lebowa's civil servants. They are already processing this month's salaries. I also wish to give the assurance that all queries with regard to salaries are handled individually, in order to make any necessary corrections.

Furthermore, it has to be borne in mind that a large backlog of suppliers' claims was lying unprocessed in the Department of Works. In some cases these suppliers have been waiting since April 1993 for payment. In order to ensure the continuation of services, claims are currently being processed in the order in which they were submitted, without regard to the sex, creed or colour of individual suppliers.

As a result of this, the first cheques to suppliers were posted on 7 October. Depending on the co-operation of Lebowa officials, overdue claims could be paid within the next six weeks.

With regard to the invitation to address representatives of officials and workers of Lebowa, it pleases me to say that a date is being finalised; possibly early next week. I welcome the opportunity to address their grievances and to place the situation into the correct perspective.

In conclusion, I wish to state the following:

- * Political considerations played no part whatsoever in the decisions made with regard to Lebowa - it is pure political opportunism on the side of those who wish to imply that.

- * Due to a statement made by the Chief Minister, to the effect that he cannot guarantee the safety of South African officials in Lebowa, the South African task team was accompanied by members of the Internal Stability Unit when they moved into Lebowa in terms of a Supreme Court interdict. The purpose of the presence of members of the ISU in Lebowa is to guarantee the safety of South African officials in Lebowa and to see that they are not prevented from exercising their duties. This in no way interferes with the powers, duties and functions of the Lebowa police.

- * Central Government obtained a Supreme Court interdict in order to enable it to print and distribute cheques for the payment of Lebowa's officials, pensioners and suppliers. The interdict ordered, inter alia, the Lebowa Government to give its active co-operation in order to normalise that territory's financial administration and to refrain from preventing officials of Central Government from performing their duties in this regard. This interdict stands as is, and, if necessary, even stronger measures will be considered.

- * Central Government intervened in Lebowa in order to help Lebowa and all its citizens. I have repeatedly stated that Lebowa's weak financial position and the continued payment of salaries as adjusted in Lebowa could have resulted in this self-governing territory having no money available by the end of November 1993 for the further payment of salaries, pensions and essential services. It is therefore in the interest of every citizen of Lebowa and that of the South African tax payer, that this situation be corrected.

- * The level of co-operation of the Lebowa Government and its officials will determine how soon any discrepancies with regard to promotions can be corrected and the correct salaries and payments to suppliers can be processed.
- * Except for my continuous endeavours to meet with the Chief Minister of Lebowa and his Cabinet in order to secure the co-operation the Chief Minister committed himself to and which had never realised, the State President, in reaction to petitions by the heads of departments in Lebowa and a committee of the Magosi, extended an invitation to Chief Minister and his Cabinet. To date we have had no response to this invitation.
- * Officials of Central Government and the Lebowa Government are currently finalising the October salaries of Lebowa's officials. We are doing our utmost to expedite this process and sincerely hope that all payments will have been made by 22 October 1993.
- * If this unfortunate interference by individuals in the Lebowa Government continues to prevent Central Government from normalising the situation in Lebowa, we will have to consider alternative actions.

I therefore appeal to all officials and workers of the Lebowa Government to give their co-operation, so that we can jointly normalise the financial administration of Lebowa and speedily settle all grievances that may exist.