

09 April 2025

Lt Gen S.F. Masemola
National Police Commissioner
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0001

Dear Lt Gen Masemola

MOTIVATION FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF FARM ATTACKS AS A NATIONAL PRIORITY OFFENCE

1. Introduction

This submission is made in terms of section 17D of the South African Police Service Act, 1995 (as amended), which sets out the mandate of the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI). We respectfully submit that farm attacks in South Africa must be classified as *national priority offences* and accordingly fall under the investigative jurisdiction of the DPCI. This submission is grounded in the legal mandate of the DPCI and supported by factual realities that underscore the urgency and seriousness of the matter.

2. Context: Why farm attacks demand priority attention

Farm attacks in South Africa are not mere instances of isolated crime. They are often characterised by:

- **extreme levels of violence**, including torture, mutilation, and premeditated murder;
- **targeting of vulnerable and isolated communities**, where response times are slow due to rural remoteness;
- **political incitement**, particularly by individuals and groups who openly advocate for land invasions or glorify violence against farmers;
- **significant economic and food security implications**, as farmers and workers are central to the agricultural supply chain; and
- **psychological and social destabilisation** of rural areas, resulting in population flight, job losses and economic decline.

These features clearly distinguish farm attacks from ordinary criminal conduct and align them with the factors used by the DPCI to determine national priority offences.

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3. Legal grounds for classification as priority crime

Per Section 17D of the SAPS Act and the DPCI's 2022 mandate document, the following criteria justify the classification of farm attacks as national priority offences:

3.1 Organised crime and national impact (Section 16(2)(a), (c), (g), (h))

Farm attacks often involve multiple perpetrators acting in a planned and repeated manner. The degree of coordination, the targeted nature of attacks, and the use of information gathering indicate syndicate-like behaviour. These are not opportunistic crimes. Many attacks are carried out by well-organised groups that rely on networks for intelligence, transport, arms, and escape.

In addition, the impact of these crimes extends beyond the individual victims. When a food-producing farm is shut down due to violence, the broader economy and food security are affected. The cumulative socio-economic harm of these attacks makes national-level intervention both justifiable and necessary.

3.2 Crimes requiring specialised skills or national investigation (Section 16(2)(g), (f))

The investigation of farm attacks frequently involves:

- complex cross-jurisdictional collaboration (especially when syndicates operate across provinces or borders);
- forensic analysis of brutal scenes and psychological profiling; and
- investigation into politically motivated incitement to violence.

This necessitates expertise, coordination, and dedicated capacity that often surpasses the capabilities and resources of local policing structures. A specialised national approach is essential.

3.3 Threats to national stability and public confidence (Section 16(2)(c))

The continued escalation of farm attacks undermines public confidence in the state's ability to protect life and property, especially in rural areas. This erodes trust in law enforcement and can foster vigilantism, racial tension, and unrest. The DPCI's mandate includes matters which, due to their nature or scale, demand national intervention in the public interest. The prevalence and brutality of farm attacks squarely meet this threshold.

4. Comparative examples within DPCI's existing mandate

The following already fall within the DPCI's NPVC or serious organised crime mandate:

- cash-in-transit heists;
- armed attacks involving firearms and explosives;
- syndicate-based infrastructure and economic sabotage; and
- crimes involving illegal firearms and trafficking.

Farm attacks often involve:

- the illegal use of firearms;
- theft of agricultural machinery and firearms from victims;
- coordination reminiscent of CIT attacks; and
- use of torture and murder tactics seen in other high-priority cases.

The treatment of cash-in-transit robberies as national priority offences is instructive. Like CIT crimes, farm attacks have national economic implications and are executed with high levels of sophistication and violence.

5. Additional considerations

- **Rural policing challenges:** Rural SAPS units are frequently under-resourced, understaffed, and poorly trained to respond to highly violent farm attacks. A national task force, with DPCI expertise, is better equipped.
- **Hate crimes and political incitement:** Several farm attacks occur in a broader climate of inflammatory rhetoric by high-profile political figures. These incitements can influence perpetrators and these links should be investigated.
- **International perception and human rights:** The government has a constitutional and international obligation to protect the right to life, dignity, and property. Continued neglect of this crisis can result in reputational harm to South Africa's commitment to the rule of law.

6. Conclusion and recommendation

Given the widespread and organised nature of farm attacks, the severe brutality involved, and their destabilising impact on society, we call upon the National Head of the DPCI to formally classify farm attacks as *national priority violent crimes* under the DPCI mandate. This classification would ensure specialised investigation, greater coordination, and a centralised approach to combat a crisis that affects not only the victims and their families but the nation as a whole.

We further recommend the formation of a dedicated DPCI task team to:

- develop a strategy specific to rural and farm-related priority crimes;
- coordinate with SAPS rural safety units, farming associations, and private security;
- ensure proper recording, tracking, and analysis of farm attacks; and
- investigate political incitement where applicable.

We look forward to your favourable consideration of this request in the interest of justice, constitutional rights, and national security.

Kind regards



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