

Water and Sanitation in the News

Drought causing job losses in Free State

The devastating drought experienced in the Free State has affected the socio-economic climate, Premier Ace Magashule said in his State of the Province Address on Tuesday. Apart from job losses, the drought had also led to increased food inflation. He said, for the first time in years, the country would have to import maize from other countries. Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, North West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga have been declared drought disaster areas. Magashule said communities should not blame the ANC for the drought. "The ANC doesn't make it rain, drought is experienced nationwide," he said. "We will continue with awareness campaigns to support farmers with advice to curb the effects of the drought and initiate rehabilitation projects on water conservation, harvesting and veld management, including fodder banks."



Meanwhile, the Democratic Alliance (DA) said earlier in February that the Free State province is failing on water supply and is one of the worst performing provinces, along with North West and the Northern Cape. This comes after the national department of water affairs released the 2014 Blue Drop report. "Only two municipalities in the province, the Mangaung Metro Municipality and Metsimaholo local municipality, obtained the blue drop status," the party's provincial leader, Patricia Kopane, told reporters in Bloemfontein. She said the remaining municipalities in the Free State that received piped water supply did not meet the minimum standards.

The North West, Free State, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal have been declared drought disaster areas. Kopane said the R39 million set aside for drought relief in the province was insufficient. "It is a sad reality that the misallocation of resources in the province by the ANC-led government, as can be seen in the purchase of luxury cars for traditional leaders and the provincial government, shows a disdain and contempt towards the agricultural sector," she said.

Whilst criticizing the ANC's response to the drought in the Free State, the DA also said last month that it has asked the Minister of Labour Mildred Oliphant to find out if expatriate Cuban engineers were being subjected to unfair labour practices in the province. The DA claimed that the Cuban engineers had not engaged in any work since they were brought to South Africa in May last year by the Free State provincial government.

At the time of their arrival, Free State Premier Ace Magashule said the 38 engineers had many skills from civil to mechanical. The engineers, who were expected to build houses, help with water provision, infrastructure development and project management, were employed on three-year contracts. "We don't have maths teachers, it's a skill denied to many of our people because of apartheid and so where can we turn to? We can always turn to our friends and those friends are from Cuba," said Magashule when the engineers arrived.

But the DA says the engineers are not doing any work, are not getting paid all their wages and their accommodation is not being paid for on time - something the party likens to "human trafficking". Roy Jankielsohn leader of the DA in the Free State Provincial Legislature said: "The cohort of Cuban engineers employed by Premier Ace Magashule continue to live in guesthouses across various municipalities while they have not taken up active duty since their arrival in May last year".

Jankielsohn added: "Moreover, the DA has it on good authority from the Cuban employees that they were told to keep quiet and are not to complain. Some Cubans are showing signs of depression as a result of remaining idle". The DA provincial leader said "what is more shocking" was that the Cubans only receive R8 000 a month of their salaries while the balance is allegedly paid to the Cuban Government.

He said the cost to the public purse for employing these Cubans, whom he said were now 45 in number, over a period of three years was estimated to be almost R110 million...

Sources: *Sowetan Live* 16 Feb 2016; *Times Live*, 01 Feb 2016; *IOL News* 07 Jan 2016

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