



**The Office of the Official Opposition
Free State Provincial Legislature**

Tel: +27 51 407 1234

Fax: +27 51 430 8338

Email: sheltonm@da.org.za

fs.da.org.za

P.O. Box 81, Bloemfontein 9300

Date:	16 September 2020
To:	Hon Sandlana Smith MPL Chairperson: COGTA, Office of the Premier and Legislature Free State Legislature
From:	Hon Leona Kleynhans MPL Member of the Official Opposition Free State Legislature
Subject:	Request for briefing by Provincial Police Commissioner on farm attacks

Dear Hon Smith,

This past weekend there were at least four attacks on farms and rural communities in the Lesotho border region around Hobhouse, Wepener and van Stadensrus. In one incident ten people were wounded, three seriously, when a gang attacked a spaza shop and a tavern, and then shot at a police vehicle in the area of Van Stadensrus. This is in addition to the estimated four other attacks on farms in the Free State during September. In another attack this weekend, farm workers were attacked by eight Lesotho residents as they were working on a fence. Another farmer and his wife watched from behind a security door of their bedroom as four attackers ransacked their house.

In response to questions filed in the Legislature, the MEC said that there were 118 farm attacks during the 2018/19, 2019/20 and two months of the 2020/21 years. These resulted in twenty people being murdered.

It is very clear that farm attacks are increasing every month and that rural communities, farmers, farm workers, and their families are living under siege. According to studies undertaken by Dr Jane Buys of Free State Agriculture, the majority of rural attacks are concentrated along the Lesotho border which consists of a dry riverbed. In Maluti-a-Phofung cattle raiding parties, armed with rifles, enter the Qwa-Qwa area on horseback and round up cattle which are then chased back over the mountains into Lesotho. As this committee has heard during our oversight visits to the Setsoto and Mantsopa municipalities, the theft of infrastructure by people simply walking through the river, is a massive factor in the inability of these municipalities to provide water and electricity, and to treat sewage.

For several years the SANDF has been deployed along the Lesotho border to prevent stock theft and farm attacks emanating from that country, but it seems that this deployment has had limited success.



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Chairperson, the situation of farm attacks and rural safety is now untenable, and as representatives of the people and members of the Legislature, we have a duty to provide oversight over the authorities tasked with ensuring this safety.

I request that, as Chairperson of the Committee which is tasked with monitoring police service delivery, you will arrange for a special briefing of the committee by the Provincial Police Commissioner, Lt-Gen Motsoenyane, and a spokesperson of the SANDF deployment, together with the MEC. This briefing should include a report on the implementation of the Rural Safety Strategy adopted by government, and a report on the circumstances along the Lesotho border. A response to a recent question in parliament revealed a huge challenge with the availability of vehicles for SAPS at station level. This must be having a very big impact on the ability of SAPS to do their work. We would also require the latest information on crime stats and other challenges being faced by SAPS. A progress report on investigations and prosecutions in terms of farm attacks and farm murders would be valuable to the committee.

In the light of the seriousness of the security situation we face in the Free State, I trust that you will arrange such a briefing session with the urgency it deserves.

Yours faithfully,

Leona Kleynhans

Member of the Free State Provincial Legislature

082 822 1101

leonak@da.org.za