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Recipient of the UNICEF Maurice Pate Human Rights Award – 1997
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An open letter to the media, other stakeholders and to all Namibians

17 July 2015

LAC APPEALS FOR CALM

The Legal Assistance Centre has noted with much concern the reactions on social media and in other fora on the pronouncement made by the Affirmative Repositioning movement that land should be allocated to applicants by 31 July 2015, or it would be occupied illegally. The potential that this dire need of a large portion of our society has to create an explosive confrontation with security forces should not be underestimated. This is something that no Namibian would like to see. Land cannot be taken without due process of the law. This is what our law provides and if we make exceptions even in a situation like this where constitutional rights may be in question, the path thereafter can only lead to lawlessness and a breakdown of the fabric of our society. In our view, government will not allow the grabbing of land to take place. It cannot, since this would in all probability affect international investment in Namibia as well as political and economic stability and will contribute nothing positive to the growth of our democracy which includes the provision of socio-economic rights, like housing. On the other hand, are we really surprised that those in need have chosen to make their voices heard? While the LAC can never condone any unlawful actions, we also cannot close our eyes to the despair of our fellow Namibians who only want a place to call their own. Public frustration about the lack of meaningful progress on land issues and signs of corruption in access to land is understandable, and we urge government to address these concerns, by lawful means, with real urgency.

The Legal Assistance Centre therefore calls upon our President Hage Geingob to personally enter the fray and communicate what plans are put in place to address the housing problem. We believe that this will indicate that government's response to the AR movement is not to batten down the hatches and dig their heels in, but rather to face the situation head on with acknowledgement of the problem and with relevant plans considered and in place.

At the same time, we call upon the landless and the AR movement to consider seriously how their actions can move Namibia to a place where it has not been since independence, a place of wholesale civil unrest and strife. Let us not go back to a place that is still a very real part of Namibian memory.

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