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 **Chronicle**

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War erupts over Tongaat Hulett land in masvingo

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From George Maponga in CHIREDZI

Lands and Rural Resettlement Ministry officials, will soon visit the Lowveld to assess the situation at Tongaat Hulett where 4 000 hectares of cane plantations were acquired by the Masvingo provincial leadership to resettle landless people, sparking serious divisions among Zanu- PF leaders in the province, as 2 000 jobs could be lost. The Government issued offer letters under the model A2 scheme to nearly 300 new farmers to venture into commercial sugar cane production at Hippo Valley and Triangle Estates owned by Tongaat Hulett.

The development sparked divisions within the Zanu- PF Masvingo provincial leadership with those opposed to the takeover of

cane fields saying the move would see over 2 000 people employed by the cane producer in Chiredzi jobless.

Those who supported the takeover argued that Tongaat was conducting operations on state land and the allocation of cane plots to indigenous farmers was part of the land reform programme.

The takeover of Tongaat land caused divisions within Zanu-PF in Masvingo and was one of the topics high on the agenda when President Mugabe held two interface meetings with members of the Masvingo provincial leadership led by Masvingo Provincial Affairs Minister Senator Shuvai Mahofa and 26 MPs in the province.

President Mugabe reportedly told the leaders that Government was against takeover of plantations and urged the Masvingo provincial leadership to look for funding elsewhere and develop virgin land into cane plots for allocation to landless people.

Lands and Rural Resettlement Minister Dr Douglas Mombeshora, yesterday said a decision on the fate of acquired Tongaat land would be made after a ground visit.

“We will only make a decision after making a visit on the ground. There is nothing more that I can say before we go to the ground,” said Dr Mombeshora.

When our Harare Bureau visited Chiredzi this week, there was uncertainty over the fate of the acquired Tongaat land with the firm’s managing director, Mr Sydney Mtsambiwa, saying his company would stand guided by the authorities. “There is nothing that I can say about that issue (takeover of 4 000ha Tongaat land) talk to the principals (Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement), we stand guided by them,” said Mr Mtsambiwa.

However, tension is rising in Chiredzi with the Sugar Production and Milling Industry Workers Union of Zimbabwe (SPMWUZ) having already given notice to embark on a protest this month to pressure Government to reverse the takeover of Tongaat land fearing for their jobs.

A notice by SPMWUZ secretary general, Mr Adonia Mutero on the planned protest, said workers in the Lowveld sugar cane industry would not continue to sit and watch while their industry was being decimated.

Speaking to the media at the end of a Zanu-PF provincial co-ordinating committee meeting in Masvingo where the takeover of Tongaat land was one of the issues tabled for discussion, Zanu-PF national political commissar Cde Saviour Kasukuwere, said Dr Mombeshora was responsible for handling the issue.

He said Zanu-PF was against self-aggrandisement and corruption in the allocation of land adding that Dr Mombeshora was best positioned to deal with the takeover of Tongaat land. "The line minister (Dr Mombeshora) is the one best placed to deal with the issue of Tongaat Hulett and he was there when we held meetings with President Mugabe so I am sure he will deal with that issue," said Cde Kasukuwere

Zanu-PF acting Masvingo provincial chairman Cde Amasa Nhenjana, said President Mugabe ordered that the takeover of Tongaat land to be reversed as the land was protected under the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Agreement between Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Tongaat is a South African company.

However, those in support of takeover of Tongaat land led by Sen Mahofa and politburo member Cde Josaya Hungwe, are arguing that there was no BIPPA agreement covering Tongaat land. "There is no going back on those who got offer letters to start sugar cane farming in Chiredzi but in future when we look for more land to resettle our people we will look for land in other areas after this case is closed.

There are still more of our people in need of land," said Cde Hungwe.

The Masvingo provincial leadership led by Sen Mahofa moved to acquire Tongaat cane plantations after the company had dragged its feet in implementing an agreement with Government to develop 4 000ha virgin land into cane plots for 138 beneficiaries issued with offer letters in December 2012.

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