LAUNCH OF THE BLACK THURSDAY LAND CAMPAIGN, 1 SEPTEMBER 2012

On Saturday 1 September 200 rural, landless people from the Southern and Eastern Cape gathered in Dysselsdorp to launch the Black Thursday Land Campaign. This campaign unites the struggles of the poor and landless by wearing black and green every Thursday until the 100 year anniversary of the Native Land Act on the 13 June 2013. Thursday was the day which the Act was promulgated and also the day of the Marikana massacre, a black Thursday indeed. Thus it is an opportune time for people to express their frustrations and to move towards actions.

Dysselsdorp, one of the biggest restitution claims in the Southern Cape, was a fitting place to launch the campaign. Oom Donie a leader of the claimant committee now elderly, blind and infirm held his lawyer’s letter stating that he is entitled to a plot and a portion of the farm. Oom Donie shakes his head in anger and frustration. Due to the long delay in settling claims his land is occupied by informal settlers and the farm is worked by a commercial farmer. It is unlikely he will see justice or reap the benefits of a lifetime of struggle for the restoration of his land.

Mama Waka of Rosmead tells of the hardships the community continue to endure since the privatisation of the railways. The majority of people were retrenched and are now unemployed yet still forced to pay up to R1 300 per month rental to Transnet. The bucket system continues with households having to dig their own holes to dispose of the waste, there is no clinic and the children must hitchhike the 10 km to school and back. The Inxuba Yethemba Municipality fails to provide services or take over jurisdiction of the settlement and Transnet continues to generate profits. “Senzele. What have we done?”

Oom Elias and Dawid Mouwers are both farm workers who tell of failed equity schemes wherein so called share holders do not reap any benefits nor are they informed of progress of the farms, having invested their one and only housing grant in the ventures. The men speak passionately their voices full of pain at the squeeze of unfair labour practices, of the closure of farm schools and of the threats which the ongoing conversion of agricultural land to mining / fracking, golf estates and game farms poses to their lifestyles and future. “Mawubuye umhlaba wethu! Give us our land!”

Young women plead for opportunities for youth in agriculture and the right to healthy food. Fathers ask, “What do I tell my 14 year old son when he asks when we will get our land back?”. Koisans chiefs advise their communities, “Take the land and build yourself a home”. The mood is both sombre and excited and the hall rocks with song and dance and is washed with tears. The Black Thursday Campaign is a sign of new resistance, of new resolve. We will take back the land.

The BTLC unites the various struggles of landless and rural people with a symbolic gesture of
wearing black and green every Thursday as a build up to the 100 year anniversary of the promulgation of the infamous Native Land Act of 1913. Dispossession continues, landlessness has not been addressed and hunger is a reality in many rural homes. The time has come for proactive land redistribution, for food sovereignty and for delivery of services and protection of human rights.

The next 12 months will see a number of protests and actions.

*Mawubuye umhlaba wethu! Give us our land. Ons sal die grond terug vat.*