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■ STATISTICS

KZN farm attacks have dropped to their lowest level in almost 20 years

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THE latest statistics released by the KwaZulu-Natal Agricultural Union (Kwanalu) on farm attacks and murders in the province have revealed that they are at their lowest in almost two decades.

The statistics contradict pronouncements by organisations such as AfriForum that the attacks and murders of farmers were out of control.

The report also dispelled the widely held belief that farm murders were driven by land, politics and race.

Kwanalu collected the data and statistics on farm attacks and murders

between January 1 and December 31 last year.

The data in Kwanalu's report was collected in commercial farming areas and included all people who lived on commercial farms in the province.

The report, said Kwanalu, included information and statistics collected by the organisation's security desk and verified with relevant sources.

It revealed that attacks and murders on farms in 2018 was at their lowest in 16 years.

It also found that in all cases where evidence had been led, socio-economic factors were the cause, with no direct link to land, politics or race.

Chief executive of Kwanalu Sandy La Marque said it was important to keep their members informed and give them insight and relevant information based on factual evidence rather than inaccurate reports.

The analysis found that there were 24 farm attacks in 2018 in the province, with the majority taking place on a Tuesday and Thursday. Twelve of the 24 attacks took place in the farmhouse, seven in the farmyard and five on the farm.

Weapons of choice included firearms, knives, axes and bush knives.

Of the 24 farm attacks and one murder, four victims were members of Kwanalu.

"What is clear from the data in the 2018 report is that the reasons behind these attacks, as in the case of previous years, are not motivated by race, land or politics but rather by socio-economic circumstances that lead to opportunistic crimes," said the report.

Dr Johan Burger of the Institute for Security Studies said that while he had not studied the provincial breakdown of the statistics, the figures released by Kwanalu correlated with the national picture.

He said it was possible the decline was attributed to the effective implementation of the rural safety strategy.

Burger said the decline should not be viewed as a trend, but rather a positive

step.

He said that while there had not been any new research done to determine the cause of farm attacks, research done while the late Steve Tshwete was still police minister correlated with Kwanalu's assessment that material gain was largely the source of violence.

"When I've pointed this out I've been accused of being insensitive. The majority of the victims are white and by far the most perpetrators are black males. These attacks are often accompanied by horrendous violence and it becomes difficult to convince those on the receiving end that this is not motivated by race," said Burger.

Ian Cameron of AfriForum said they

had not seen the report and would like to read it first before commenting.

He said that KwaZulu-Natal was one of the areas that had recorded a low incidence of farm attacks especially in the past two years, although there had been a number of incidents this year.

He took exception to the assertion that in most recorded cases, race was not a motivating factor, saying it would be irresponsible to state that without considering other factors.

"We can say that the number of farm murders has gone down, but farm attacks are still high. We believe the downward trend in farm murders is because farmers and farm workers are fighting back."