

Farmers guard jail during strike

Prison authorities call for help after inmates run amok

PREGA GOVENDER

AN EMBATTLED prison this week urgently asked Limpopo farmers to help prevent dangerous prisoners from breaking out of the facility.

Armed with handguns and rifles, 60 farmers from Makhado in Limpopo stood guard at the perimeter fence of the privately owned Kutama Sinthumule Correctional Centre on Tuesday night after prisoners ran amok during a strike by warders.

A 37-year-old inmate died and another was injured during the unrest.

Gideon Meiring, chairman of the Transvaal Agricultural Union's safety and security committee, said the chief of the prison, Alfred Makgaila, had called him out of desperation.

In a letter to Meiring to confirm his call for assistance, Makgaila said the understanding would be that the TAU would provide "a number of suitable candidates to assist with our external

back-up without getting involved in the staff-related disruptions currently being experienced at the prison".

Makgaila said the TAU's "willingness to assist the institution in a time of need... is highly appreciated".

Said Meiring: "When I arrived with

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my group, there was a lot of teargas and smoke as inmates set the place alight."

Limpopo police spokesman Superintendent Ailwei Mushavhanamadi said rubber bullets were fired to stop

the prisoners from escaping.

According to Sapa, extensive damage running to millions of rands was caused to one of the units, which accommodates about 1 152 maximum-category offenders.

Meiring told the Sunday Times that the mostly fruit and game farmers had borne the brunt of taunts and jibes from an angry mob of inmates as they stood guard for more than six hours.

"The prisoners threatened and verbally abused us, telling us to go back to our farms, but we stood our ground. Our actions definitely helped prevent any prisoner from escaping."

He said chaos would have reigned in the town had the prisoners escaped from the prison.

"Often after a farm attack, because of the rugged terrain, it takes days to apprehend the culprits."

He said the farmers returned home after the SA National Defence Force arrived to provide assistance.