

White South African refugee program

In February 2025, a refugee program officially known as **Mission South Africa** was launched by United States president Donald Trump to grant asylum to white South Africans and other minorities in South Africa, primarily Afrikaners, under claims of systemic violence and racial discrimination linked to South Africa's post-apartheid land reform policies. The Trump administration justified the program by alleging that White South African farmers were victims of what it described as a "genocide" and state-backed persecution. Claims of white genocide in South Africa have been entirely discredited.

The initiative was met with strong opposition from the South African government. South African president Cyril Ramaphosa has denied allegations of systemic violence against Afrikaners.

Background

Racial discrimination and inequality against Black, Coloured, and Indian people in South Africa dates to the beginning of large-scale European colonization of South Africa with the Dutch East India Company's establishment of a trading post in the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, which eventually expanded into the Dutch Cape Colony. The company began the Khoikhoi–Dutch Wars in which it displaced the local Khoikhoi people, replaced them with farms worked by White settlers, and imported Black slaves from across the Dutch colonial empire.^[1]

Serious political violence was a prominent feature from 1985 to 1989, as Black townships became the focus of the struggle between anti-apartheid organizations and the Botha government. Black town councillors and policemen, and sometimes their families, were attacked with petrol bombs, beaten, and murdered by necklacing, where a burning tyre was placed around the victim's neck, after they were restrained by wrapping their wrists with barbed wire. Detention without trial became a common feature of the government's reaction to growing civil unrest and by 1988, 30,000 people had been detained.^[2] The media was censored, thousands were arrested and many were interrogated and tortured.^[3]

On January 23, 2025, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa signed into law the Expropriation Act permitting the state to seize property without compensation in certain cases. South African officials framed it as an attempt to address the negative effects of apartheid.^[4] Proponents of the bill point to the fact that white South Africans own farmland covering half the country, despite constituting 7% of the population.^[5]

United States

Upon assuming office on January 20, 2025, President Trump signed an executive order shutting down all refugee admissions while making a single exception for white South Africans.^[4] and other minority groups in the country.^[6] On February 7, Trump signed Executive Order 14204, ending all U.S. foreign aid to South Africa, claiming that its government had been engaging in "race-based discrimination".^[7] and systemic violence.^[8]In

that same executive order, he said that the U.S. would "promote the resettlement of Afrikaner refugees escaping government-sponsored race-based discrimination, including racially discriminatory property confiscation", and grant Afrikaners rapid pathways to citizenship.^[9]

Trump has also raised claims during his first term that white South African farmers are supposedly being killed in large numbers, a claim also echoed by Elon Musk who called it as a genocide. However, updated statistics published by the New York Times show 101 of 225 people killed on farms in South Africa between April 2020 and March 2024 were black workers, while 53 were farmers who are normally white.^[10] There are roughly 26,000 people murdered each year in South Africa with about 0.1% on farms and most of those victims identified as black.^[11]

In March 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared South African Ambassador to the United States Ebrahim Rasool *persona non grata* for criticizing Trump's 2024 presidential campaign and policies.^{[12][13]}

Implementation

In March 2025, the U.S. Department of State said that it had received 8,000 inquiries into the refugee program.^[5] According to reports, the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria had been conducting interviews and processing families, while State Department officials began chartering planes for the families scheduled to leave South Africa.^[14]

On May 12, 2025, the first group of 59 white South Africans arrived in Dulles in northern Virginia under the program. They were welcomed at Dulles International Airport by U.S. officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau, and were provided with resettlement assistance.^[4] According to the State Department, all spoke English, and about a third already had relatives in the United States.^[14] The refugee applications of the Afrikaner minority were expedited by the Trump administration, which cited "racial discrimination" as the justification for granting priority status.^[15]

On June 2, 2025, U.S. officials reported that a second group of nine white South Africans arrived a few days prior.^[16]

In October 2025, the Trump administration announced that it was restricting the number of refugees admitted annually into the United States at 7,500 for the 2026 budget year. There was no mention of any other specific groups to be admitted outside of white South Africans.^[17]

Trump–Ramaphosa Oval Office meeting

On May 21, 2025, South African president Ramaphosa made a state visit to the US to meet with President Trump. During the press conference, Trump confronted Ramaphosa with false^{[18][19]} claims of white genocide against Afrikaners in South Africa, which Ramaphosa strongly denied.^[20] During the meeting Trump displayed an aerial shot of thousands of white crosses lining the side of a rural road, that he termed a burial site of thousands of Afrikaners that had been murdered. While Trump did not indicate where the road was, local South Africans identified the site as a roadside memorial for two Afrikaner farmers that were murdered five years prior along with all murder victims that occurred on farms regardless of skin color.^[21]

Trump also played two separate clips to Ramaphosa of two controversial South African opposition politicians, including Julius Malema, leader of the minority EFF party, singing songs that were popular during the struggle against apartheid, such as "Kill the Boer," which called for violence against the descendants of Boers.^[22] Trump printed out articles in which he claimed showed death and violence but were found by third party checkers were either unsubstantiated, from partisan blog postings or the wrong country.^[23] The following day, a screenshot Trump displayed during the meeting which he claimed showed "all white farmers that are being buried" was revealed to be taken from a Reuters video shot in the Democratic Republic of Congo, following a rebel offensive in Goma.^[24]



Trump meets with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in the Oval Office on May 21, 2025.

Reactions

Support

Trump defended his actions, stating that "it's a genocide that's taking place" and added, "Farmers are being killed, they happen to be white, but whether they're white or black makes no difference to me."^[15]

Senior advisor to the president at the time, Elon Musk— a white South African himself, amplified the claims of "white genocide" in South Africa.^[25]

Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau welcomed the Afrikaners, saying that they were experiencing "threatening invasions of their homes" and that they could easily assimilate into American culture.^[26]

A white South African farmer who lost seven farms to droughts and bad business decisions,^[27] was angered by the allegedly racist South African Expropriation Act and by actions of the banks. He said that the program was a "fantastic opportunity" for him and his family. The farmer is part of a group of Trump-supporting white South Africans, such as social media influencer Willem Petzer, who stated "With the support of the West, we can make South Africa great again".^[11] One white South African refugee in the US said that due to the new land rules "Your land becomes worthless" and that he had fled due to threats on WhatsApp, machinery being damaged, and local police reportedly failing to act of reports.^[28]

Opposition

Several Democrats have condemned the resettlement plan, including Maryland senator Chris Van Hollen, who described it as part of the Trump administration's "global apartheid policy".^[29] New Hampshire senator Jeanne Shaheen called it an attempt to "rewrite history".^[26] Gregory Meeks of the House Foreign Affairs Committee said it is "not just a racist dog whistle, it's a politically motivated rewrite of history".^[15]

The Episcopal Church of the US responded by terminating their partnership with the federal government, as they were morally opposed to resettling the white Afrikaners.^{[30][31]}

South African officials claimed that the initiative was "politically motivated and designed to question South Africa's constitutional democracy", citing Trump's criticism of South Africa's ties to Iran and its genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.^[5] Ramaphosa criticized the U.S. assessment as "not true". He also criticized the white South Africans that resettled in the U.S., calling them "cowards" and stating that "they'll be back soon."^[32]

A group of prominent Afrikaners, including business leaders, academics, and descendants of apartheid-era figures led by Piet Croucamp and others, wrote an open letter, rejecting Trump's assertions that there was systematic persecution of white South Africans. The letter "Not in Our Name", which garnered 1,500 signatures in a week, was sent to multiple US senators and raised challenges to Trump's claims, writing that white Afrikaners are not under any "existential threat".^[33] A white South African farmer stated that those who went to the US were "not real farmers" and were just "opportunists."^[11] Writer Max du Preez, who is descended from a long line of Afrikaners, wrote a piece in The Guardian slamming the move, pointing out that "South Africa's progressive constitution with its extensive bill of rights is intact; the rule of law is maintained, and the judiciary is independent and functioning; we are a genuinely open society with free speech and media that many other democracies, especially Trump's America, can be jealous of".^[34]

See also

- South African Americans, over 100,000 people born in South Africa live in the United States
- Immigration policy of the second Donald Trump administration
- South African farm attacks
- Racism in South Africa
- South Africa–United States relations § Second presidency of Donald Trump
- 2025 Trump–Ramaphosa Oval Office meeting
- White flight

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