

APPEAL TO THE BRITISH PUBLIC ABOUT THE NATIVE LAND ACT, 1913

**by John Langalibalele Dube
President, South African Native National Congress**

[This extract from the appeal was published by Gandhi in Indian Opinion with the following editorial note: "The Native Land Act of the Union Parliament has created consternation among the Natives... This land is theirs by birth and this Act of confiscation – for such it is – is likely to give rise to serious consequences unless the Government take care. Anyhow, such is the impression created by the piteous, pathetic and passionate appeal addressed to the British public by Mr. John L. Dube, President of the South African Native National Congress." – E.S. Reddy]

While you are sitting happy and comfortable in your bright and wealthy homes, just give one thought to the hundreds of native families, men, women, and little children, even at this moment, being ruthlessly evicted from their humble homes, where perchance they were born, turned homeless, helpless, and hopeless, on to the roads – wandering in misery about the land of their forefathers in search of any wretched spot whereon to live and rest. And then, think you, that at the very moment this calamity is overwhelming them, your Government and your representatives actually come forward and block the way of these wretched people to raise for themselves a new home on any farm-land. And the farm-lands are nine-elevenths of the total surface of this Province. Why, I ask, should you treat us thus? We do not ask any social equality or intercourse with your race. We do not ask anything the most fastidious of you could call unreasonable. We do not ask for anything even the lowest and vilest of your own race does not already possess. We do not ask for anything the most niggardly among you could honestly refuse us. We ask for freedom to purchase land wherever opportunities occur, and our sparse means permit. We ask that we be permitted to build for ourselves a home wherever a landlord is agreeable. Who can affirm that such requests are unreasonable or impossible...

You must know that every one of us has been born in this land, and we have no other. You must know that for untold generations this land was solely ours – long before your fathers had put a foot on our shores. Have we not humbly submitted to you might, and given up to you the possessions and the wealth of the government of our fatherland? Have we not since then, willingly and cheerfully, done for you all the hard and uncongenial work you would not do for yourselves – of your industries, your commerce, your homes? Have we not re-spent our small earnings to your own profit, bringing you considerable trade, pouring our money back into your coffers, faithfully paying you rack-rents of £ 10, £ 15, and £ 20 a year for the mere right of squatting on your farms, which were originally our farms? In what have we harmed or angered you, that you should now turn upon us with the pitilessness of men devoid of hearts, with the

despotism born of tyrants? Yet, such is our reward, and all we need hope for – and from a British people in a British land! All the benevolent wishes of our dead good Queen { Victoria} towards her native subjects, all the hopes her name inspired, all the promises her Ministers gave us – all now trampled under foot as mere anachronous drivel. And she is not yet 20 years in her grave. No hearts move for us; no sympathy now for the weak, the poor, the helpless, inarticulate, downtrodden, in a British land. Only God now left to help us and protect us.