

Government must take decisive action to stop violence

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TAC demands urgent and decisive action by Government to halt violence against refugees and immigrants

- Political and civil society leadership must act to end xenophobic violence and hate-Crimes
- Deploy South African National Defence Force to curb violence
- [Equal Treatment Issue 25 is published: Report on the systematic abuse of immigrants](#)

19 May 2008

The Treatment Action Campaign condemns the wave of xenophobic violence sweeping through communities in Gauteng. We call on Government to take action to halt the violence; to put in place a national strategy to protect the safety, health and well being of victims of xenophobic attacks and to take steps to prevent the violence from spreading further.

With the violence now having spread to almost a dozen communities in and around Johannesburg and threats of violence issued elsewhere across the country, including Cape Town, we demand more effective action from Government to deal with the crisis. Specifically we ask Government to:

- Call together all political parties, President Mbeki and all political party leaders to visit sites of violence and to condemn it in the strongest terms.
- Draft contingency plans, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, to manage the violence and its after-effects should it spread to other areas of the country. While we sincerely hope that the violence will be contained and halted in Gauteng, we urge every municipality to put in place coherent strategies for dealing with possible outbreaks of xenophobic violence.
- Designate and make available places of sanctuary for victims of xenophobic attacks. The current system whereby victims take shelter at police stations is unsustainable; Government must identify sites where large numbers of people can be comfortably accommodated and easily protected.
- Distribute emergency social assistance packages to all displaced persons.
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Initiate a sustained media campaign condemning the violence. We ask for our political leaders to be more visible and to go on radio and television condemning the attacks.

TAC reluctantly calls for the deployment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to assist the police services in curbing the violence. Although this brings back terrible memories of the Apartheid era, the police services do not have the capacity to stop the violence without the support of the SANDF.

Ending violence and restoring dignity to refugees, immigrants and undocumented migrants is not only the task of government. All civil society organizations, charities, humanitarian bodies and NGOs must establish a unified and coordinated response to this national humanitarian emergency. TAC is working with the AIDS Law project, Lawyers for Human Rights, Legal Resources Centre and other organisations to address the crisis.

Equal Treatment Issue 25 (June 2008) has been published. This edition of **ET** focuses specifically on the needs of refugees in South Africa, you can download an electronic copy at:

<http://www.tac.org.za/community/files/file/et25.pdf>

Xenophobia is rife in South Africa. However, repression of immigrants, refugees and undocumented people goes beyond naked violence in poor communities. Earlier this year, police raided the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg, beating up and arresting immigrants, mainly from Zimbabwe. The state systematically abuses the rights of immigrants: health workers deny treatment, home affairs officials demand bribes and police assault immigrants regularly. Then there are institutions like Lindela, where people are incarcerated in ghastly conditions before being deported despite not having committed any crime. This all goes on while the South African government refuses to recognise that people fleeing from Zimbabwe are refugees.

This issue of Equal Treatment contains a special report on the systematic abuse of the rights of immigrants. We hope that it galvanises South Africans to stand up against xenophobia, both by the state and in our communities.

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