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Xenophobic Violence: Western Cape Emergency Civil Society Task Team Established; WC Security Forum established

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Since Sunday 11 May 2008, xenophobic violence has swept through Gauteng. Beginning in Alexandra, the violence rapidly spread to two dozen communities across the province, including the inner city of Johannesburg. At least 23 people have been confirmed dead, hundreds injured and more than 7000 people dispossessed and displaced.

So far the Western Cape has not experienced the levels of violence witnessed in Gauteng. But we have seen isolated attacks against foreign nationals, and have received information on further planned attacks. A meeting of over 20 civil society organizations was held in Cape Town yesterday to discuss a strategy for pre-empting what has happened in Gauteng from spreading to this province.

As in Gauteng, we have established a civil society task team made up of trade unions, faith based organizations, legal and human rights organizations, humanitarian agencies and refugee organizations. The purpose of the Task Team is to work with the WC provincial government and with national government to prevent violence against foreign nationals and to provide humanitarian and other forms of assistance where necessary.

The Task Team will:

1. Liaise and collaborate with broader civil society on all matters relating to the protection of the rights of foreign nationals in the WC.
2. Take proactive steps to prevent attacks against foreign nationals by mobilizing and educating all communities across the WC province.
3. Develop and enact emergency contingency plans, in collaboration with other stakeholders, for the delivery of humanitarian and social support services to affected persons, should widespread xenophobic violence break out in the WC.

The Task Team will also elect 3 representatives to sit on the newly formed Security Forum that the SAPS has established in the WC. The other members of this Forum include the National Religious Leaders Forum, provincial government and the SAPS. The Security Forum has been mandated to meet and report immediately to deal with any reports of xenophobic violence in the WC.

In light of the fear and instability that has already been created by the violence in Gauteng, we call on national government to make available its plan to deal with this unacceptable crisis. We hope that such a Plan will take the following into account:

1. A moratorium on all deportations of foreign nationals;

2. Protection for foreign and migrant communities especially in high-risk areas such as trains, refugee reception offices and potentially volatile communities;
3. Provision of alternative shelter including food, blankets and other basic necessities;
4. Fast tracked investigation, arrest and prosecution of those arrested for carrying out such attacks.

Furthermore, we salute the many individuals and organizations that have provided humanitarian assistance to the victims of the violence in Gauteng and elsewhere. They are working under tremendous pressure and with limited resources.

All of our organisations condemn the xenophobic violence. The perpetrators of these attacks do not do carry out such barbaric acts in the name of ordinary South Africans. We distance ourselves from such conduct and will work tirelessly to create a society that promotes the human rights of everyone.

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