



**23 May 2008**

## **JOINT PRESS STATEMENT**

**Xenophobic Violence: Western Cape Emergency Civil Society Task Team established; WC Safety Forum established; Solidarity rally planned for Cape Town.**

Since Sunday 11 May 2008, xenophobic violence has swept through Gauteng. Beginning in Alexandra, the violence rapidly spread to more than 20 communities across the province, including the inner city of Johannesburg. At least 42 people have been confirmed dead, hundreds injured and more than 10 000 people dispossessed and displaced in Gauteng alone. Recent media reports indicate that the violence is now spreading to Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal.

So far the WC has not experienced the levels of violence witnessed in Gauteng and elsewhere. But we have seen isolated assaults on immigrants, systematic attacks against Somali nationals and have received information on further planned violence. A series of meetings with over 20 civil society organizations present were held in Cape Town this week to discuss strategies for pre-empting what has happened in other areas of the country 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 relief 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; and
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 has also elected 4 representatives to sit on the newly formed Safety Forum that the SAPS established in the WC. The other members of this Forum include the National Religious Leaders Forum, provincial government and the SAPS. The Safety 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 and elsewhere, 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. Active assistance from the Department of Home Affairs to those who have lost their documentation in the violence;
3. Protection for foreign and migrant communities especially in high-risk areas such as trains, refugee reception offices and potentially volatile communities;
4. Provision of alternative shelter including food, blankets and other basic necessities; and
5. Fast tracked investigation, arrest and prosecution of those arrested for carrying out such attacks.

The President has now authorised the SANDF to support the SAPS in quelling the violence. We would like Government to inform us of the length of military's deployment as well as what system of oversight will govern it.

### **Report of attacks in the WC last night**

We are concerned that xenophobic attacks and violence erupted last night in the Western Cape. However, due to an effective SAPS response and the immediate provision of disaster relief we were able to work together with government to contain much of the violence and provide immediate assistance to those who needed it. We will work with government to prevent xenophobic violence. The message we want to send is that we are prepared to tackle any attempt to cause chaos in the WC.

### **We have received the following reports about attacks in the WC**

Du Noon.

After the attacks in Du Noon last night many people were sheltered at the Killarney race track. About 380 people are displaced, and there were 6 cases of minor injuries. Those attacked were mainly Somali traders.

In Masimpumelele, the shops of Somali traders were looted. Somalis and other foreign nationals did flee but no injuries are reported.

In Knysna, about 400 people, mostly Somalis, are staying at the town hall after being attacked and chased away when their shops were looted.

Khayelitsha Site B – two shops were looted.

People who have been attacked and fled their homes are naturally tense and anxious. They have been robbed of their possessions removed from their communities and homes. They are terrified and feel as if they have nowhere to turn.



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

We are therefore appealing to South Africans to stop the violence, speak out against xenophobia, and act out against xenophobic violence. Now is the time to do so.

For this reason, we will be holding a public solidarity meeting in Cape Town at the St George's Cathedral next Tuesday 27 May 2008 where eminent and ordinary South Africans will be speaking out against the violence that is ravaging our country.

We repeat, all of our organisations condemn the xenophobic violence. The perpetrators of these attacks do not 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 health and human rights of everyone.

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