



PRESS RELEASE
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Multi-pronged response required to curb Xenophobia

The Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, expresses its concern over the most recent upsurge in xenophobic violence across South Africa. This comes in the wake of reports on the attacks on, and killings of, Somalian nationals in Diepsloot, Gauteng, and outside Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape.

One area of concern about the xenophobic epidemic in South Africa is the media coverage. Video footage of some of the attacks has been circulating on the internet, with insufficient coverage in the local media. It is disconcerting that xenophobic attacks are not investigated in depth by the main media houses in South Africa. It is imperative that the media explore the cause of xenophobia at grass root level, identify the issues, and influence popular perception.

We fear that xenophobic attacks are becoming regular phenomena, and the South African population is becoming increasingly desensitised. While law prohibits heinous deeds such as sexual and violent crimes, the South African population has grown apathetic to these issues with little hope of them being addressed. Similarly, public actions seem to imply that the gravity of the situation is lost on us, despite the fact that xenophobic violence has been a pervasive part of our society since 2008.

Education is the key to understanding and addressing social issues, and it is in this light that we call upon all institutions of higher learning to join hands in addressing this issue. We need to start formulating plans on how to incorporate the issue of xenophobia into syllabi, create better awareness around xenophobia, and disseminate information about the scope and protection of the South African Constitution to citizens and non-citizens.

The irony cannot escape us that these events started as our leaders converged in Addis Ababa to celebrate 50 years of 'African Unity'. Clearly, many challenges remain before we can claim unity on the African continent. One step on the road towards a solution is to teach South Africans that they share a common fate with all other Africans. Partly, this realisation will come from a keener appreciation that present South Africa would have been impossible without the contributions of Africans and African leadership across the continent in supporting the anti-apartheid movement. A stronger focus on African integration should therefore be made part of education at all levels, in the appropriate form.



It was in our neighbouring countries that the leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle took refuge during this difficult era, including our own current President. President Jacob Zuma should therefore understand the importance of supporting people that fled their countries as a result of intolerable situations better than most. When xenophobic violence started in South Africa five years ago, then-president Thabo Mbeki failed to address the issue adequately. It is of the utmost importance that President Zuma seize this opportunity to convey a message to the South African population about the important role that refuge played in the anti-apartheid movement, and reiterate South Africa's obligation to support refugees from other African states.

The Centre for Human Rights calls upon the government and South African Police Service to ensure timely and detailed investigations into all sources of xenophobic attacks. Investigations should be made into the too-often recurring allegations that unemployment and poverty are directly linked to the influx of foreign nationals into South Africa, as it is clear that we cannot dismiss these allegations out of hand. We need public figures to express their sincere concern about the issue, and sustainable measures should be put in place to improve the protection of foreign nationals within South African borders.

Addressing xenophobic violence and its root causes requires a multi-pronged approach. The Centre for Human Rights therefore urges that all appropriate measures be taken to ensure the following:

- Thorough investigations are undertaken.
- Rigorous prosecution of offenders take place.
- Information be published and disseminated of those prosecuted.
- The media explores the root causes of xenophobia in greater depth.
- Higher and other education institutions reflect on ways of addressing xenophobia through educational programmes.
- Politicians, including our President, speak out and prioritise the issue.

Visit <http://www1.chr.up.ac.za/index.php/xenophobia-project.html> for more information on earlier projects done on Xenophobia.

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