



EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY 11TH MAY 2009

8th May 2009

PRESS STATEMENT

One Year Later: More Action Needed to Prevent Further Violence and Xenophobia

Exactly one year after residents of Alexandra turned on their neighbours unleashing a chain of violence across the country, foreigners in South Africa face continued threats of xenophobic violence. Little has been done by authorities to address the root causes of the violence and as a result, threats of violence against foreigners remain common in some communities.

The attacks that began on 11th May 2008 sparked some of the worst violence that South Africa has experienced since the advent of democracy. 62 people were killed and thousands displaced and, collectively, not enough has been done to ensure that further attacks do not target non-nationals, marginal South Africans or anyone who is not seen as 'belonging' within a particular community.

There remain a number of challenges that collectively government, civil society and international organisations in South Africa need to address to prevent further violence. Vigilantism remains common with individuals taking the law into their own hands in the name of 'fighting crime'. One such incident led to two non-nationals being forced to jump to their deaths from a high-rise building in Durban in January this year. An eThekweni City councillor has been charged in connection with the incident.

Violent strikes and service delivery protests continue. In the past these have often resulted in attacks on non-nationals. There are currently insufficient mechanisms to deal with community concerns before people resort to protests.

Statements from leading politicians continue to cause divisions in South Africa with some openly xenophobic statements being attributed to leaders. These reinforce the many prejudices held within South Africa society and prevent the social cohesion South Africa so desperately needs to prevent vulnerable individuals or groups being marginalised.

Accountability of those responsible for public violence remains minimal. Too few perpetrators of last year's violence have thus far been successfully prosecuted and it appears there have been insufficient investigations into those responsible for instigating and fueling the violence in some areas. There has also thus far been no public inquiry by government.

There remain insufficient conflict resolution mechanisms in place in many areas to address tension when it emerges before it results in violence. Since May 2008, further threats of violence against non-nationals have occurred in Diepsloot, Tsakane, Potchefstroom, Erasmia and other areas and it is largely left to the police and a few well-intentioned individuals to prevent violence.

Yet in many cases, the cause of the conflict is not addressed. No government department currently takes responsibility to consistently address such conflict.

There do not currently appear to be policing strategies to monitor crimes targeting particular groups at risk. Seemingly 'isolated attacks' on non-nationals continue in particular areas and greater monitoring of these trends will allow for the creation of better strategies to prevent vulnerable groups being targeted.

Following the election of 22nd April, we welcome in a new government. This is an opportunity for us to collectively address our shortcomings and assess how we can jointly ensure that South Africa lives up to the ideals enshrined in our Constitution. Let us ensure that safety and security for all in South Africa remains a priority of the new government and that we build greater linkages between government, civil society and international organisations to develop joint strategies to address the security needs of all. We call on President Zuma and his new administration to condemn xenophobia and to introduce measures to ensure that South Africa deals with this scourge.

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The Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) is the South African national network of refugee and migrant service providers. It is mandated to co-ordinate the national network and advocate on behalf of its member organisations to bring about social change. Its members are Amnesty International, Black Sash, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Christians for Peace in Africa, Co-ordinating Body of Refugee Communities, Durban Refugee Service Providers Network, Forced Migration Studies Programme, Jesuit Refugee Service, Lawyers for Human Rights, Musina Legal Advice Office, Refugee Children's Project, Refugee Ministries Centre, Refugee Pastoral Care, South African Red Cross, Southern African Centre for the Survivors of Torture, Tutumike Network, University of Cape Town Law Clinic and University of Witwatersrand Law Clinic. For more information, please visit www.cormsa.org.za.