

South Africa is currently experiencing xenophobic violence on an unprecedented scale. Today's Presidential decision to call on the armed forces to intervene shows that these events will lead to dramatic changes in South Africa's social and political landscape. In this environment, it has become increasingly important that we base policy discussion on fact, and sound research, not speculation and myth.

With this in mind the Forced Migration Studies Programme, registers its concern at the following ideas currently being floated in the media:

1. 'Totally unexpected attacks'

Various commentators have reacted to recent and high intensity attacks on non-nationals as if they were a new and surprising phenomenon. This view is epitomized by Deputy Foreign Minister, Aziz Pahad's statement that 'I believe it is a matter of record that the police, and reservists, in very difficult circumstances have attempted to do their best in dealing with **what has been a totally unexpected phenomenon in our country.**'

These remarks should be questioned in light of the well documented trend towards organized, mass violence against foreigners in townships and informal settlements [see list of attacks over last 12 months below]. Both the media and civil society representatives have consistently sought to direct public attention to this ongoing problem. Organizations such as the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa have called on government to adopt a more pro-active response. While our organization believes it is not the time for 'I told you so' accusations, it is misleading and unhelpful to represent the current violence in Gauteng as an isolated and unexpected incident. These statements divert our attention from the failure of government to respond to clear indications of a serious problem.

2. 'The Third Force'

The shocking nature and scale of recent violence have given rise to widespread speculation about the involvement of a so-called 'Third Force'. This reference to clandestine and counter-revolutionary militias of the Apartheid era, has been used to suggest significant levels of coordination and orchestration behind the attacks. Such claims have been attributed to members of the NEC, Cabinet and local government.

These discussions cloud and sensationalize the true nature of recent violence. Our research has shown that violence against foreigners has usually been orchestrated at a local level by groups and individuals seeking to capitalize on residents' fears and suspicions. Our work also supports the SAHRC's contention that there is a copy-cat dynamic at play, where groups and individuals mimic counterparts in other areas of the province or country. Subsequent investigations may reveal instances of co-operation and co-ordination between the various sites where violence has occurred. However, if there is evidence to date that these events were planned and orchestrated by a single organization or individual they need to be substantiated and made public. If not, the 'Third Force' reference simply detracts our attention from the serious inter-ethnic and inter-communal animosities and grievances that have caused violence across the country.

3. Border control is the solution

Many of the perpetrators of the violence have explained their actions as attempts to compensate for the government's failed efforts at border control. Some commentators have picked up on this concern to suggest that incompetent border management has encouraged recent violence. For example the Institute of Race Relations argues: 'Poor policy decisions and simple incompetence in border policing...contributed directly to the presence of a large illegal population in South Africa. Without adequate legal standing in the community these people became easy or soft targets for mob violence.'

This claim, which is supported by a call for additional border controls, papers over the fact that the South Africa has been pouring huge amounts of additional resources into border control particularly on the Limpopo River. In 2006 [the latest figures] South Africa deported over a quarter of a million people, a hike of more than 56 000 on the previous year. This costs taxpayers a lot of money – how much we simply don't know. And yet, we still have large numbers of people classified as illegal living in South Africa. The problem is not that South Africa has not been patrolling borders and arresting 'illegals', it is that these sorts of policy responses simply don't work. Instead, we should be trying to integrate non-nationals into South Africa, beginning with the idea of providing some form of temporary protection to Zimbabwean nationals.

The Forced Migration Studies Programme calls on all South Africans to exert caution in the way they represent the crisis and to seek to promote reasoned debate on policy options. We will continue to conduct research and develop practical proposals towards this end.

ANNEX: List of recorded attacks against foreign nationals.

- Delmas (MP) – October 07. Following a service delivery protest by residents, shops owned and staffed by non-nationals were attacked and looted. 40 non-nationals fled and were temporarily accommodated at mosques and with friends.
- Mooiplaas – (GP) December 07. Minor clashes between South African and Zimbabwean nationals led to retaliatory attacks resulting in over 100 shacks being burned.
- Duncan Village (EC) – January 08. Two Somalis were found burned to death in their shop. Police later arrested seven people in connection with the incident.
- Jeffrey's Bay (EC) – January 08. After a Somali shop owner allegedly shot dead a suspected thief, a crowd of residents attacked Somali owned shops and many Somali nationals sought shelter at the police station
- Soshanguve (GP) – January 08. Attacks started after four non-nationals allegedly broke into a spaza shop owned by a local trader. Residents apprehended the suspects and allegedly burnt one of the suspects to death. After this incident, residents called for foreigners to leave. Shacks were burnt and shops belonging to non-nationals looted. Many non-nationals fled the area.
- Albert Park (KZN) – January 08. The community forum held a meeting to address the issue of non-nationals living amongst them. The community indicated during this meeting that they wanted non-nationals living in that area to leave.
- Laudium (GP) February 08. At a community meeting in the informal settlement of Itireleng some members encouraged residents to chase the non-nationals out of the

area. Violent clashes took place. Shacks and shops belonging to non-nationals were burnt and others looted.

- Valhalla Park (WC) – February 08. Residents forcefully evicted at least five Somali shop owners from the area after having apparently ‘warned’ the shop owners to leave three months before.
- Atteridgeville (GP)- March 08. At least 7 lives were lost in a series of attacks that took place over a week. The deceased included Zimbabwean, Pakistani and Somali nationals as well as a South African who was mistaken for a foreign national. Approximately 150 shacks and shops were burnt down, destroyed or vandalized. Approximately 500 people sought refuge elsewhere.
- Worcester (WC) – March 08. A large group of Zwelethemba informal settlement residents went on a rampage destroying foreign-run shops and leaving a large number of foreign nationals homeless.
- Memelodi (GP) – April 08. The first sign of attacks being coordinated across multiple sites by a single organisation. Fifteen shacks and spaza shops were also burnt down in the area. One girl was burnt to death in her shack.