



The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

Johannesburg Office: 4th Floor, Braamfontein Centre, 23 Jorissen Street, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa;

Tel: +27 (11) 403-5650, Fax: +27 (11) 339-6785;

Cape Town Office: 501 Premier Centre, 451 Main Road, Observatory, 7925;

Tel: +27 (21) 447-3661, Fax: +27 (21) 447-5356;

PO Box 30778, Braamfontein, 2017 Email: info@csvr.org.za Website: www.csvr.org.za

Understanding current xenophobic attacks and how South Africa can move forward

Presentation made at the Parliamentary Seminar on Migration and Xenophobia

20 June 2008

On the 19th of May the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) convened a meeting of all Chapter 9 Institutions as well as NGO's to discuss Civil Societies response to the xenophobic violence. During this meeting the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr) was mandated by the SAHRC to coordinate the humanitarian response by CSO to the displaced victims. This is a task which we have taken seriously. As part of this task we have been able to gather regular detailed information from all the sites in Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni over the crisis period. Our reports include detailed information on each site and have been used to address gaps that may have been identified. We, together with other partners, have also been successful in establishing a website where these reports can be accessed, namely: www.saemergency.info

Part of CSVr's core business involves understanding the underlying causes of social phenomena. To this end we have conducted research and interventions into areas related to the current crisis, namely: migration, integration, xenophobia, violence, and trauma. Based on this we would like to outline some areas we feel are key relating to: understanding the causes of the resent violence; the response to this violence; as well as the way forward.

Understanding the causes of violence against foreigners:

1. Climate of xenophobia in SA – this is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. There have been many reports highlighting the xenophobic attitude within SA communities as well as well documented incidents of public and institutional violence and hostility towards foreigners.
2. Culture of violence. We need to acknowledge and address the fact that we as South Africans use violence to deal with both personal and societal challenges. This is linked to the fact that we come from a history whereby violence was used systematically. Yet, we have not done enough to address this history and the subsequent unresolved trauma. This culture of violence is evidenced in the high levels of crime and violence in SA.
3. Outsider-insider phenomenon. We tend to attack those that we see as other, those who are more vulnerable and seen as outsiders. The danger here is that this could be taken a step further, escalated and applied along other lines such as ethnicity.

4. Frustrated SA communities. We should take heed of the message being given by SA communities (especially the poor). These messages revolve around issues that are not new to us, such as:
 - a. Poor service delivery
 - b. Disappointed expectations of post-Apartheid SA
 - c. Increased competition for resources and/or opportunities
 - d. Feeling of not being heard. This is a key area of concern which we have highlighted through previous research.

Response to the violence:

1. We need to acknowledge that had it not been for ordinary SA's, FBO's, CBO's and NGO's this crisis would have been far worse. In some areas such as KZN, Civil Society is the only one responding to the needs of the displaced people.
2. Governments' response has been slow, uncoordinated, and done without sufficient consultation. This has often resulted in mistakes being made which could have easily been averted (e.g. The selection of Vickers Rd as a site in Johannesburg that is next to the George Koch hostel which has a history of violence which was only prevented as a result of an a successful application for an interdict by CS. Another example is the establishment of a site in Wadeville when there were concerns expressed regarding toxicity levels in the soil which has now been confirmed and has resulted in the forced removal, once again of this community of victims – twice at the hands of the Government). We hope that Government will learn from this experience and ensure that this does not happen in the future.
3. At the same time we do know of some instances where community structures (including local government) were strong, the violence was averted or mitigated and integration has been facilitated. We need to learn from these experiences and replicate them elsewhere.

Going forward:

1. Working with the displaced communities. We need to continue to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the displaced population are adequately met. We need to continue to monitor the sites and respond effectively to the needs in a way that is empowering. Some areas of concern at existing sites include: protection and security; adequate nutrition especially for women and children, information and communication with or from Government, and psychosocial support. It is important that people be treated in a humane way that restores dignity.
2. Integration:
 - a. Let's be cautious when speaking of integration
 - b. We know from experience from other countries such as Rwanda and Kenya that it is a complex process that if not managed correctly could have serious consequences. We know that from our own context with ex-combatants that the impact of poor or lack of integration strategies can be felt years later.
 - c. We need to be aware that we are talking about integrating people back into communities where they have experienced extreme violence and loss.
 - d. While we need to ensure that we support the victims regarding their trauma, most of the work needs to be done with the SA communities.
 - e. It is in the SA communities that various areas need to be addressed, such as:

- i. Building trust between them and the victims
- ii. Investigate the underlying causes and beginning to address these constructively
- iii. Addressing the myths surrounding foreign nationals and raising awareness regarding migration and refugees
- iv. Laying the groundwork for conflict transformation in those communities so that we may prevent future incidents
- v. Giving a voice/space to SA community members so that they do not feel that the only way to make their voices heard is through the use of violence against the most vulnerable of our society

Lastly, we need to keep an eye on the fault lines to democracy which are often highlighted by CSO's, organisations such as ourselves and the many other organisations present here today but, unfortunately often ignored. We need to work together to address these issues constructively. By we, I am referring to SA citizens, CSO's, government at all levels and foreign nationals. We need to ask ourselves, "what am I doing today to reduce xenophobia and address the related underlying issues".

Thank you.