

'Local leaders spurred xenophobic attacks'

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA Dec 22 2008 11:09

The lack of a "legitimate elected leadership" was behind much of the May xenophobic attacks, the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (Cormsa) said on Monday.

Cormsa spokesperson Duncan Breen said in many areas local leaders were actively involved in fuelling the violence that left 62 people dead earlier this year.

"Therefore their involvement in strategies to address xenophobia is of grave concern. Unless these leaders are held accountable, they will continue to base their campaigns and positions on an agenda of hate and violence," he said.

"As the deaths of more than 20 South Africans during the attacks indicated, not only foreigners were at risk.

"Before long, Pedis, Shangaans, Vendas, or anyone 'undesirable' may be attacked, Breen said.

"Unless we take action now, we will all be at risk."

Cormsa has since called on the South Africa Human Rights Commission (HRC) to hold an inquiry into the xenophobic violence.

Breen said the need for such an inquiry stemmed from the fact that more than six months after the violence broke out, little had been done to address the structural and political causes.

"With national elections on the horizon, there is an urgent need to ensure that political mobilisation does not result in repeated attacks on foreigners or other 'outsiders'," he said.

With Cormsa believing that anti-foreigner violence continues, albeit "at a lower level", the organisation said to curb it, it was necessary to identify and address the root causes.

The HRC has been given until January 15 2009 to respond to Cormsa's request for an inquiry into the attacks that also left scores of people displaced. -- Sapa

Source: Mail & Guardian Online

Web Address: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-12-22-local-leaders-spurred-xenophobic-attacks>

