



Locals also among the victims of mob justice

By Barry Bateman and Laea Medley

"They will kill us like chickens if we go back there. We have no choice but to go back home," said Zimbabwean Evans Mlambo, one of about 300 immigrants forced from their shacks by marauding gangs in the Brazzaville informal settlement, west of the city, in a week of violence.

The victims are being cared for at a temporary shelter established at a primary school in Atteridgeville.

With his face bruised and battered and left eye swollen shut, Mlambo said he was attacked by an angry mob of local residents on Saturday.

"They hit me in the face with stones and chased me away from my shack. But I have permission to be here. There are many here with passports, but we will wait until we can go home," he said.

On Tuesday, Home Affairs Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and Tshwane executive mayor Dr Gwen Ramokgopa visited the temporary shelter.

From there, illegal immigrants will be sent to Lindela Repatriation Centre to go back to their home countries while those here legally will be reintegrated into the communities that shunned them.

However, most are too afraid to go back.

Mapisa-Nqakula explained to the immigrants that the camp at the school was only a temporary solution and they would ultimately have to find new accommodation once the tension had been resolved.

The minister had earlier told angry South Africans at the scene where Zimbabwean Chamunorna Kufondada, 38, was beaten and burnt to death that they had to learn to live alongside immigrants.

But not only immigrants have been the victims of the violence; another charred body, thought to be that of a South African, was found a few hundred metres away.

South African Rebecca Marai said her home was torched because a mob thought she was an immigrant.

"They burnt everything. How can a community turn on us like this? All they see is Zimbabweans everywhere and it doesn't matter if you have the same ID as them," she lamented.

Marai said her husband, who was at home at the time of the attack, was lucky to be alive.

"They searched him and stole his cellphone."

She said she was not worried about her husband because he was a man and could fend for himself, but was concerned for the safety of her four children, aged 18 months to 20 years old.

"All they have is the clothes on their backs," she said, holding her youngest child.

"School starts soon and they have to go."

Duncan Breen, from the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (Cormsa), said: "Safety must come first and peace must be restored within the community before reconstruction can take place."

Breen said they were trying to manage the conflict.

He said working groups had been formed and were trying to assist, but that government needed to resolve the issue.

United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) deputy regional representative Abel Mbilingi shared Breen's view on who bore the ultimate responsibility for finding a solution.

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) will embark on a fact-finding visit to the informal settlements on Wednesday.

SAHRC spokesperson Vincent Moaga said they strongly condemned the attacks and similar others around the country where the violation of the human rights of foreign nationals continued.

"Our visit forms part of the commission's mandate of investigating human rights violations and making recommendations to any organ of state where it considers such action advisable," Moaga said.

- This article was originally published on page 3 of [The Pretoria News](#) on March 26, 2008

PRETORIA NEWS

Published on the Web by IOL on 2008-03-26 05:18:00

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