

Spectre of hatred a threat to calm

08 January 2009

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Two foreigners' death raise fears of xenophobic attacks

The welfare of refugees has once again been put in the spotlight after the death of two foreign nationals in KwaZulu-Natal, seven months after the outbreak of xenophobic attacks last year.

Victor Zowa, a Zimbabwean national, and Tanzanian Omar Said plunged to their deaths from the sixth floor of a flat building while fleeing a mob armed with machetes and other weapons at the weekend.

Albert Park councillor Vusi Khoza has denied that the attacks were xenophobic.

He said the attacks were "a reaction of the community to crime" in the area.

Fears that the violence had resurfaced were first raised when a "scuffle" broke out between South Africans and Nigerians on Saturday in Windsor East, north of Johannesburg.

Gauteng police spokesman Superintendent Eugene Opperman said the conflict arose because of residents' concerns about drug-related crimes.

The Coalition Against Xenophobia, an umbrella body of civil society organisations such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum and Soweto Concerned Residents, said it would organise protests leading to the first anniversary of anti-foreigner violence in May.

More than 60 people were killed during the violence that engulfed Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape last year.

CAX spokesman Steve Faulkner said the body would intensify its campaign to close the Lindela Repatriation Centre in Krugersdorp.

The coalition staged a 24-hour picket outside Lindela in November, demanding the closure of the centre.

It compared Lindela to a "concentration camp" where detainees' human rights were violated.

Faulkner said the organisation would highlight "institutionalised xenophobia" displayed by officials of the Department of Home Affairs, "who treat refugees like animals".

"We have anecdotal evidence of officials demanding bribes from asylum seekers before having their applications processed," said Faulkner.

Last month the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa expressed concern that “no one had been prosecuted for murder and assault” during the violence.

Cormsa said in a statement: “Anti-foreigner violence continues, albeit at a lower level.

“With national elections on the horizon there is an urgent need to ensure that political mobilisation does not result – as it has repeatedly – in attacks on foreigners. ”

The consortium also asked the Human Rights Commission to investigate the attacks.

Cormsa said: “As the deaths of more than 20 South Africans during the May attacks illustrate, not only foreigners are at risk. Before long, Pedis, Shangaans, Vendas, or anyone ‘undesirable’ might be attacked.”

HRC chairman Jody Kollapen said it was disconcerting that no one was prosecuted for the violence.

He warned that this would create the impression that perpetrators could “attack foreigners and get away with it”.

Cormsa also blamed a “lack of legitimate, elected leadership” in communities for the violence.

“In many areas local leaders were actively involved in fuelling the violence and so their involvement in strategies to address xenophobia is of grave concern,” Cormsa said.

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