

For Immediate Release

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Freedom for All: Addressing Xenophobia and Advancing Inclusion in South Africa

Thirty-one years ago, South Africa reached a defining moment in its history when it held its first democratic elections, allowing people of all races to vote for the very first time. This historic day marked a powerful turning point for the nation. Millions of people cast their votes, many for the first time in their lives signaling not only the official end of apartheid, but also the dawn of a new democratic era. It paved the way for the election of Nelson Mandela as the country's first Black president.

Today, this moment is commemorated annually as Freedom Day, a day that stands as a symbol of freedom, dignity, and the power of collective voice. Every year, this day brings a national theme, and this year's theme is "Freedom and the Rule of Law: Thirty Years of Democratic Citizenship". However CoRMSA has opted to observe this day under the theme of "***Freedom for All: Addressing Xenophobia and Advancing Inclusion in South Africa***"

The Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) joins the nation in honouring this monumental day. As we reflect on the journey toward freedom, we are reminded of the enduring importance of equality, inclusion, and the right of every person to have a voice in shaping the future of our country.

However, for many, the promise of freedom and inclusion remains out of reach. Deep inequalities continue to shape everyday life, with millions of people still excluded from meaningful participation in the economy and access to opportunities that enable dignity and stability. High levels of unemployment, poverty, and systemic barriers continue to limit who truly benefits from the gains of democracy. These challenges are even more for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, who often face additional layers of exclusion, discrimination, and restricted access to basic services and livelihoods.

Asylum seekers, Refugees, and migrants in South Africa continue to face a number of challenges. Documentation remains a major barrier, limiting their ability to access employment, healthcare, education, and other essential services. Barriers within administrative and legal systems further worsen their situation, leaving many in unstable living conditions with limited protection and support compared to their counterparts. They also continue to face xenophobia, discrimination, and, at times, violence reflecting a pattern of hostility that has affected foreign nationals in South Africa over the years.

In trying to address these inequalities faced by non-nationals, on 18 April 2027, more than 150 people gathered at Mary Fitzgerald Square in Newtown, Johannesburg, to protest against xenophobia in South Africa. This march was organized by Kopanong Africa Against Xenophobia (KAAX) and other like-minded NGOs including CoRMSA. During the march proceedings, Thifuluheli Sinthumule, Executive Director for CoRMSA, emphasised that the government should enforce the laws for all who live in South Africa and be held accountable. CoRMSA calls on the government to take urgent steps to address xenophobia, strengthen protection mechanisms, and ensure that the rights of all people regardless of their nationality or status are upheld.

To attest to this, CoRMSA expresses deep concern over ongoing unlawful and brutal xenophobic incidents in KwaZulu-Natal, which threaten lives and undermine social cohesion. These acts violate the fundamental rights and dignity of all people. We call on law enforcement to intervene immediately to prevent further escalation and protect affected communities. As South Africa reflects on its journey since 1994, it is important to recognise that the work of building a truly inclusive and just society is ongoing. Freedom must be experienced by everyone who lives in the country, not just in principle but in practice.

CoRMSA reaffirms its commitment to advocating for the rights, dignity, and protection of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, and calls on all sectors of society to stand against xenophobia and work together towards a future where no one is left behind.

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