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South Africa

Stop xenophobia in its tracks!

- News from around the world -

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The National Working Committee of the United Front is outraged by the recent outbreak of violence in Soweto and elsewhere, especially against other Africans. We must act now before it spreads further!

These explosions of xenophobia are not new and will overwhelm us if we do not act decisively. We extend our condolences to those families and communities that have lost loved ones or have been displaced by the violence.

The United Front is appalled by reactionary and dangerous comments on the attacks from public officials.

It is both ridiculous and reckless to ascribe such actions to “criminal elements”, as was done recently by Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa on radio. Racism, xenophobia and the targeting of immigrants for violence and looting must be condemned, but we cannot afford to remain blind to the true underlying causes of such violence.

It is clear that the ills of poverty, miserable living conditions, lack of hope and unemployment are fuelling the explosive anger, resentment and frustration experienced by sections of our youth and marginalised township residents. Added to this is the rivalry between small local and foreign shop owners both struggling to eke out a living. Police involvement, harassment, brutality and ignorance are other factors to add to the toxic mix.

We must recognize, yet not excuse in these acts of looting people’s desperation for access to the most basic necessities for life. Recent reports on malnutrition in South Africa have emphasised something we should already know and treat as urgent: that millions in South Africa go to bed hungry at night, with little hope that tomorrow will be any different.

The fact that shops of foreign nationals in particular are targeted speaks to the entrenchment of chauvinistic, tribal and xenophobic attitudes under the country’s leadership in recent years. Substantial responsibility for this dangerous trend must be laid at the door of the ANC, and its compulsive habit of blaming its failures on unnamed “foreign elements”. If the ANC is concerned about the damage being done to South Africa by foreign elements, it need look no further than the owners of the multi-national corporations its policies they serve, and the wholesale profiteering and looting in which they are engaged.

For too long, the promise of greater regional integration and cooperation amongst the people of Africa has been sacrificed on the altar of the minerals-energy complex. We must recognise that the ANC’s on-going complicity with historically white and foreign capital has produced a political and economic order that has not only failed to deliver the basic necessities of life to millions of South Africans, but has further shredded South Africa’s already deeply frayed social fabric. The potential for serious, widespread violence is all too real, and the consequences will be devastating.

We are not the first country where the masses turn on one another, or find scapegoats to vent their frustrations, whilst the political rulers, the bosses and the rich are unaffected and look on with clean hands. In Europe we see the rise of fascism in the midst of economic collapse, mass unemployment and rising inequality.

Yet, the victory of the anti-capitalist Syriza party in Greece demonstrates that there is another way to fight against the failures of the capitalist system. Racism and Xenophobia can and must be resisted. It is precisely why we have formed the United Front: to unite our people, to bring our movements together and to fight for jobs, land, the provision

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of decent health and education, electricity, water and dignity – not for some – FOR ALL!

The National Working Committee of the United Front calls on all South Africans to reject the slanderous demonisation of poor and working people, no matter where they were born.

For the sake of the future of our country: It is vital that we not only speak out on this issue but organize and mobilise against all forms of xenophobia, racism and division!

It is vital that we stand in unity and solidarity with our African brothers and sisters and with those coming from other countries. An injury to one is an injury to all.

We demand:

Â. That our government addresses the true causes of xenophobia and faces up to the reality that “xenophobia is xenophobia” if we are to stop this menace!

Â. That the police cease harassing anyone who looks “foreign”! It is a form of “racial profiling” that has no place in our country.

Â. That all police implicated in fermenting xenophobia be charged and removed from the SAPS and that the police be educated, enlightened and trained according to our Bill of Rights and are made accountable for their actions!

Â. That government, parliament, political parties, trade unions, community based organisations, non-government institutions, public services, faith groups, cultural associations, schools and educational institutions be marshalled to counter the plague of xenophobia!

Â. That our trade unions, civic organisations and communities must draw into their ranks foreign-born residents!

We must organise to:

Â. Detect and respond to every threat or outbreak of xenophobic violence.

Â. Publicly condemn all threats or outbreaks of xenophobic violence.

Â. Strengthen conflict resolution and prevention mechanisms at community level.

Â. Fight for access to justice for victims of xenophobic violence.

Â. Ensure that the disaster management systems work and provide assistance to displaced persons.

Â. Co-ordinate local level measures to prevent social conflict and strengthen social cohesion.

Â. Demand government accountability for civil servants who abet xenophobia.

Â. Conduct a propaganda campaign tackling myths and misconceptions about foreign nationals.

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Â. Call for laws to protect against crimes motivated by prejudice.]

In addition it is urgent that we address the underlying socio-economic ills by:

Making unemployment a national emergency and for the state to play a decisive role in creating decent work, banning labour brokers and ensuring a living wage for all and urgently implementing a basic income grant.

We believe that it is vital for our country to engage in a more honest and enlightened debate on the causes of the crisis, and on an alternative way forward for the country, the region and the world.

If we fail to halt xenophobia and racism in its tracks these related poisons will spread like a cancer and engulf us all. Recall our long and inspiring history of combating the demons of tribalism and ethnicity that pit Zulu against Xhosa, Sotho against Tswana, Sipeedi against Shangaan and not least between Africans, so-called Coloureds and those of Indian origin. We must live the principles of non-racialism, ubuntu as elaborated in the Freedom Charter in its noble words "South Africa belongs to all who live in it!"

THE UNITED FRONT WILL LEAD A MASS STRUGGLE AGAINST XENOPHOBIA AND RACISM TO ACHIEVE THE SOUTH AFRICA WE WANT!

DOWN WITH THE MENACE OF XENOPHOBIA!

WORKERS AND THE POOR UNITE YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS

FIGHT THE SYSTEM NOT BROTHERS AND SISTERS

FORWARD TO A UNITED AFRICA

INTERNATIONALISM & SOLIDARITY FOREVER

A LUTA CONTINUA! AMANDLA NGAWETHU!

28 January 2015

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