

# FOCUS South Africa



## Immigration

### After the riots

At the beginning of May several townships bore witness to an outbreak of attacks by black South Africans on African immigrants. A total of 62 people were killed and hundreds were injured. In addition, shacks were set alight and businesses were plundered. Between 70 000 and 100 000 people fled their homes. After initially finding protection in police stations and churches, 50 000 people found provisional accommodation in camps, while the rest have either left the country or returned to the townships. This sudden and unexpected outbreak of violence took the government by surprise and establishing the cause of the attacks remains difficult.

**"This is not just about defending the victims, but also defending democracy."**

*Charles Nqakula*, Minister of Safety and Security

## The current situation

Peace once again prevails in the townships of South Africa, where just a little while ago, foreigners were brutally attacked. The rapid deployment of the army into the poorer areas proved fruitful, but the situation in the emergency camps remains strained. The International Red Cross assumes that because of the violence about 51 000 foreigners in South Africa had become internal refugees (internally displaced individuals). The majority (28 000) of these individuals are located in the province of Gauteng, which includes the metropolis Johannesburg, as well as the seat of government in Pretoria. In the Western Cape, which includes Cape Town, approximately 20 000 people were left homeless, while KwaZulu-Natal reported approximately 2 500 refugees.

While most of the individuals had taken refuge in police stations and churches, the government furnished provisional camps for approximately four weeks. Camps were established together with the assistance of the refugee welfare organization of the United Nations (UNHCR), while Cape Town opened areas of its city centre and offshore resorts. Here, people were supplied with food, sanitary articles and clothing. The health ministry erected mobile clinics, while non-governmental organizations attempted to establish contact between the different camps in order to obtain information regarding possessions that might have been left behind.

More than 25 000 individuals have returned to Mozambique, where the government declared a temporary state of emergency in order to deal with the influx. Only a small portion of Zimbabwean immigrants, who make up the largest immigrant group in South Africa (approximately 60 percent), returned to their home country, while the rest chose neighbouring countries of Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique. Most Zimbabweans hope for the situation in the townships to calm down, since an improvement in the situation in their home country is unlikely. Only recently the opposition called for a boycott of the

elections and inflation still remains at a record high. Therefore approximately 5 million Zimbabweans find themselves in South Africa. Before the outbreak of the violence thousands of Zimbabweans crossed the border into South Africa daily, until violence erupted in the townships as well.

## What happened in the South African townships?

At the beginning of May, in several poorer settlements in South Africa, black South Africans launched a series of attacks on black African immigrants, including legal as well as illegal immigrants. Armed with knives, batons and pistols, a group of men in the Johannesburg settlement of Alexandra hunted down individuals from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and other foreigners who did not speak their language. They set houses on fire, looted businesses, murdered and raped. Residents of the townships, who were not directly involved in the attacks, seemed to approve of them and even applauded on the pavement. Attacks spread to other settlements in Johannesburg, while in the next few weeks attacks were reported in further areas of the country, particularly in Cape Town and Durban.

The perpetrators accused the foreigners of stealing their jobs and houses, and of being responsible for the high crime rate in the country. The perpetrators justified

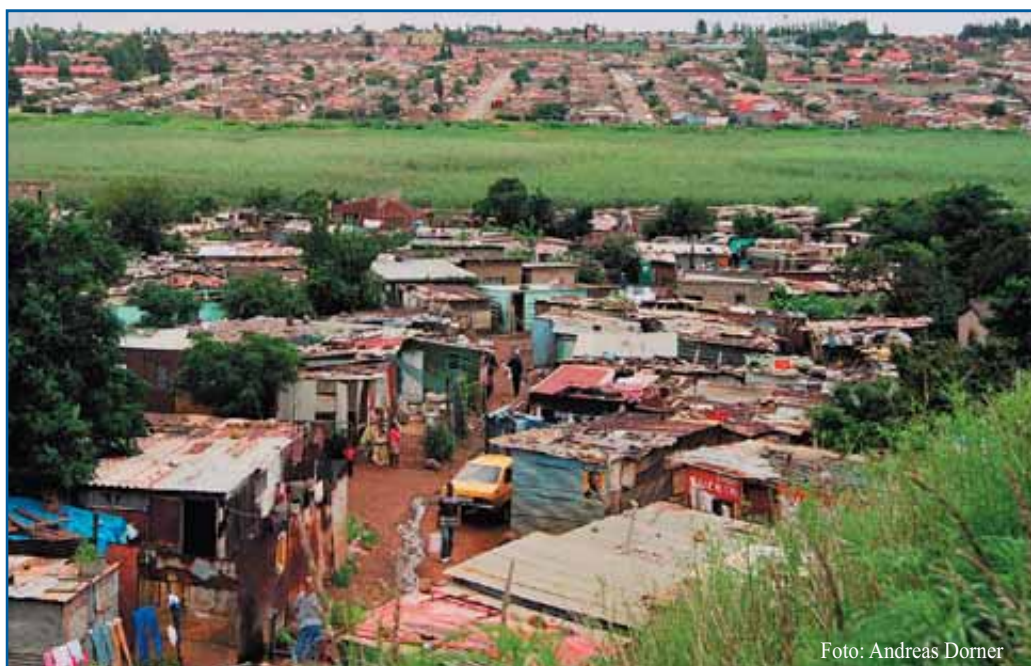


Foto: Andreas Dörner

Poverty in Soweto, township near Johannesburg

their attacks by saying that since the government refuses to deal with the problem, they then are encouraged to take matters into their own hands.

Should the first outbreak of violence indeed have been xenophobic in nature, then criminal groups used this motivation in order to profit from lawlessness and chaos, and to enrich themselves at the cost of the possessions of the victims.

Immigrants from Mozambique, and the crisis-ridden Zimbabwe, as well as Somalia, Nigeria and Ethiopia fled to police stations and churches. Their search for protection led them to give up their homes, their possessions and their businesses. They left with only the most important possessions. Approximately 100 000 immigrants were left homeless as a result of the violence. Even though most of them were not directly victims of the violence and aggression, the situation had left them so unsettled that they no longer felt safe in their homes.

## The Causes

Experts have for a long time warned of an increase in hostility toward foreigners within the black population of South Africa. In 1997 a total of 25 percent of the South African population admitted to wanting immigration into South Africa prohibited. Nine percent indicated that they would react to acts of violence. A total of 45 percent indicated the need for clearer borders of immigration while 61 percent considered the principal problem to be the fact that the immigrant communities in the country were actively placing strain on existing resources (South African Migration Project, SAMP 1997).

The South African Institute of Race Relations had, at an earlier stage, warned of an increase in racism. This was however markedly less in the relationship between various groups of black South Africans, than in the relationship between black South Africans (80 percent) and the rest of the population groups (whites 9 percent, coloureds 8 percent and Indians 2 percent). According to Franz Cronje (SAIRR), “the problem of xenophobia is not new, even though the sudden outbreak of violence has surprised everybody.”

The situations which led to the outbreak of violence in Alexandra have in the meantime, become well-known. In Alexandra’s Extension 7, the origin of the violent attacks, many homes had been provided to foreign immigrants who had bribed managers within the municipal governments. These reports had been rejected by the municipal governments, who indicated that approximately 15 percent of the 400 000 individuals living in shacks within a square kilometer area in Alexandra are foreigners. According to Julian Baskin, “this has more to do with the distribution of social welfare housing, than hostility towards foreigners.”

Non-governmental organizations and academic institutions have regarded the principal cause as a level of frustration which has increased steadily over the years amongst the poorest South Africans, who still statistically remain in the black population.

Fourteen years after the end of apartheid 40 percent of the population remains unemployed, while two thirds of the youth have no future perspectives. Furthermore, an increasingly large portion of black South Africans live in shacks without electricity or running water.

### Too monochrome

Highest level of education by race among 20+ year-old South Africans, 2003, %

Race	No schooling	Some/completed primary	Some secondary	Completed secondary („matric“)	Higher
Black	22.3	25.4	30.4	16.8	5.2
Coloured	8.3	28.2	40.1	18.5	4.9
Asian	5.3	11.9	33.0	34.9	14.9
White	1.4	2.0	25.9	40.9	29.8

Source: Statistics South Africa



While the level of competition at the end of the social ladder increased strongly, expectations also increased with the end of racial segregation and the beginning of democracy. Unfortunately the governments of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki could not fulfill these expectations rapidly enough. According to Winnie Mandela, the Chairperson of the ANC Women's League and one of the few politicians who physically visited the settlements and listened to the residents, "The principal problem is the lack of care provided to the population in terms of service delivery. The unbearable living conditions to which

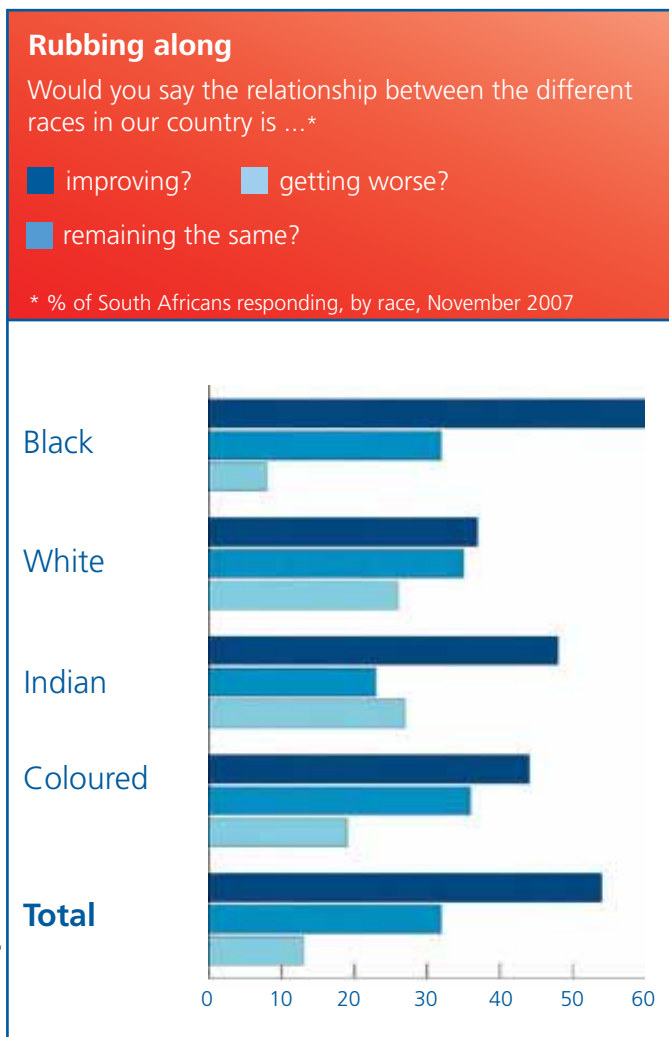
for nutrition, employment and accommodation has sharpened greatly." It does not surprise him that black South Africans have turned against their neighbours from other countries. "The weak react against those who are even weaker," according to Dr. Nyakarashi, "Foreigners were the easiest scapegoats, and the illegal individuals amongst them were the easiest victims."

## The reaction of the government

While the media reacted immediately to the first outbreak of violence, and the opposition discovered the issue, the government reacted very slowly. President Thabo Mbeki only released a statement after a few days and dispatched the armed forces to support the police. Only after national and international critic and the obvious damage to the reputation of his government, Mbeki released a public statement on Africa Day. In his statement he strongly condemned the violence and promised the victims his help. Besides implementing a commission to establish the causes of the violence, no concrete measures were visible. Even his minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula was forced to admit that she did not know the exact number of immigrants. Her husband, Charles Nqakula, responsible for safety and security, was also unable to provide assistance.

The situation in the second most-affected province, the Western Cape, has turned into a battle between the Premier Ebrahim Rasool (ANC) and the Mayor of Cape Town, Helen Zille of the opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA). While Rasool encouraged the opening of further sectors of the city centre, Zille called on provincial politicians not to impede the freedom of movement of the refugees. Only a verdict issued by the highest court was able to resolve the problem, placing the responsibility on the mayor, but also effectively sharing her views regarding the freedom of movement of the refugees. Ultimately the battle has to do with an unequal distribution of responsibility. Cape Town is the only metropolis not governed by the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), and which has been the site of much controversy since the assumption of the mayoral position by the opposition.

Ultimately six large refugee camps and 18 community centres were erected in the province and placed



these individuals are subjected have encouraged them to resort to violence. This is not simply xenophobia."

The cost of fuel and food has more than doubled in the last few weeks. According to Dr. Emmanuel Nyakarashi of the Methodist Church in Johannesburg, "The poor sector of the population always has to struggle to provide themselves with the basic living necessities. The battle

at the disposal of the refugees. Several problems have been reported in the largest of these camps in Soetwater. According to Sam Pearce, an on-site observer of the camps for various non-governmental organizations, "More than 3 500 people inhabit 10 huge tents. The two main camps are located directly on the coast and are at the mercy of the cold front. The tents are humid and cold. The children become ill, the women despairing, and the men agitated." The camp is divided into an upper and a lower level, managed by various refugee-representatives. It is therefore no surprise that many people complain about the inadequate accommodation, heating, meals and

Congo (DRC) to go on a hunger strike. The highest rate of suicide attempts were recorded amongst groups from Somalia. It is ultimately clear that the conditions in the refugee camps remain inadequate. Similar conditions were also reported in the province of Gauteng.

### Prospects

By the end of July it is anticipated that the refugees will either be returned to their home countries, or the South African townships from which they were forced to flee. The government under President Thabo Mbeki, as well as on a provincial level, has indicated their desire that the refugees are returned, or are able to return to the South African Townships.

„Our three-tiered program is currently running, “according to Virginia Petersen, spokesperson for the Premier of the Western Cape, „firstly providing humanitarian aid and security for the victims, secondly launching a campaign against xenophobia and racism in the townships, and finally re-integration.” Petersen hopes that the refugees will ultimately be able to return to their townships since, “social workers are at our disposal and the UN refugee program is providing training in this field.” Even in the province of Gauteng, which was the worst affected province, authorities remain optimistic that the refugees will be able to return to their townships within the next two months.

A survey distributed by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) brought disturbing results to light. In response to the question of whether or not South Africans would accept foreigners, two thirds responded with “No” and proceeded to justify their positions with statements like “Foreigners Out” and “South Africa for South Africans”. A further inquiry conducted a week later attempted to establish whether or not the exiled individuals should be re-integrated into society. Two thirds of the responses were against this sentiment. These sentiments were confirmed by the World Values Survey. A change in the mentality of the population would require much more time, since the consequences and history of colonialism and apartheid, as well as expansive poverty and inequality would clearly not be erased over-night. Furthermore, tolerance cannot be induced on short notice by law.



**In many South African townships the people are sharing only a few water-connections**

medical care, and since the South African government is currently under significant pressure, this has led to various differences of opinion. According to press reports groups from Somalia had encouraged their neighbours from Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the

According to Colleen Loewe Morna, an expert affiliated with the organization Gender Link, the problem lies in the fact that „South Africans have problems with „others“. Xenophobia, homophobia, racism and sexism are all expressions of the same problem. She further encouraged the government to step down from its ivory tower and develop a population with a capacity for tolerance. “We don’t only need more help for the poor, we also need to encourage the conviction that variety forms the fundamental basis of our society.”

President Mbeki and his cabinet decided to accelerate the creation of water resources, social housing and employment opportunities. Government, on the provincial and district levels, was encouraged to do more against corruption, and to take a firmer stance against xenophobia. In addition, not only would the perpetrators be punished, but the situation in the camps would and should be improved as soon as possible. Themba Maseko of the provincial government in Gauteng promised “that we will not tolerate any more violence. We are working with civil authorities to offer the victims secure and tolerable accommodation. Food, medical supplies, blankets and clothing are being made available until such point as they are able to return to their townships.”

The minister responsible for immigration, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula promised to waive the examination of the residence permits of the exiled individuals. The government has rejected the option of remuneration of the victims of the violence. The Minister of Safety and Security, Charles Nqakula, announced that the police have arrested 1 436 suspects and that the majority of the subsequent procedures have already been introduced. “We are working towards a brisk resolution,” said Nqakula, “this is not just about defending the victims, but defending democracy.”

The media has recently been referring to a power vacuum within the ANC, which actively threatens their current problematic status. The fact that the South African President Thabo Mbeki was voted out of his position as head of the ANC has effectively weakened him. It is clear that tension exists between Mbeki and his successor Jacob Zuma whose governing strategies have been heavily criticized, but who remains, nonetheless the most likely candidate for the position of president.

A clear direction and unity concerning sufficiently concrete measures and a competent leadership position are lacking.

It is clear that the country has also suffered a loss in terms of the perception of its public image. “We are very concerned,” says Moeketsi Mosola, the Chairman of the South African Tourism Board, “especially because 67 percent of our tourists originate from the neighbouring countries in Africa.” This is especially significant in light of the fact that the country finds itself under extreme pressure because of the looming 2010 football world championship. According to Danny

Jordan, the chairman of the FIFA organization committee, “the government should to do everything in its power to alleviate the suffering of those forced into exile.” Furthermore Jordan remains convinced that the current problems experienced within the country will be solved by the start of the world cup and will not in any way hinder the country’s capacity to host the championship. The mot-

to for the championship has already been confirmed: “Ke Nako. Time to celebrate Africa’s humanity.” Until then, the government would consequently not only be responsible for dealing with and confronting xenophobia, but also the causes thereof. The critical situation in the neighbouring country of Zimbabwe as well as inadequate policies regarding immigration into South Africa, have lead to eruption of violence. Furthermore, the increasingly high cost of living, poor prospects for the country’s youth as well as their continual marginalization, also cast a shadow over the country’s capacities to host the football world championships. ■



Foto: Andreas Dörner

Ancient election poster:  
Also in townships the standing  
of the ANC is shrinking



## Editorial

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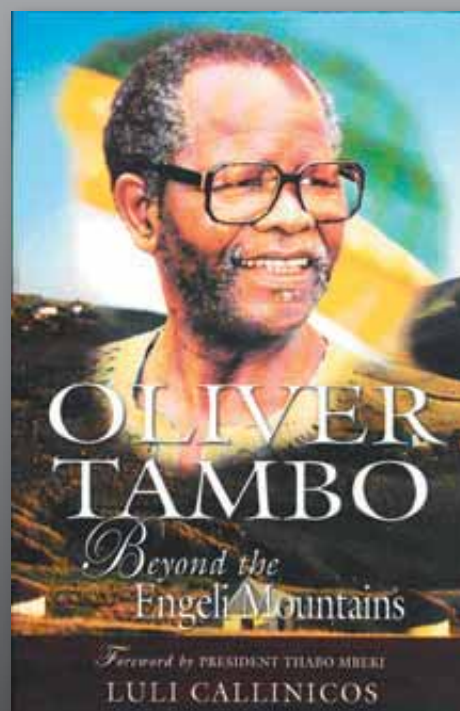


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