

Zuma calls for calm, end to violence

Jacob Zuma has condemned the recent "shocking and unacceptable" incidents of violence directed at foreign nationals in some parts of KwaZulu-Natal and has appealed for calm...



Zuma: "No amount of frustration or anger can justify the attacks on foreign nationals and the looting of their shops." (Image: GCS)

Addressing the National Assembly in Parliament on Thursday, the President said the attacks, which have spread to some parts of Gauteng, cannot be justified under any circumstances.

"We appeal for calm, an end to the violence and restraint."

He said government will, through the criminal justice system, take stern action against those responsible for the violence and looting and ensure that they are brought to book.

"No amount of frustration or anger can justify the attacks on foreign nationals and the looting of their shops. We condemn the attacks in the strongest terms.

"The attacks violate all the values that South Africa embodies, especially the respect for human life, human rights, human dignity and Ubuntu. Our country stands firmly against all intolerances such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia and sexism," he said.

Zuma extended condolences to the families of all who have lost their lives and wished the injured a speedy recovery.

The President's message follows attacks directed at foreign nationals over the past week.

"Fellow South Africans, we urge all of you to exercise calm and restraint. We also urge those who use social media to

refrain from fanning the flames of violence on Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms.

"We all have a responsibility to promote social cohesion and peaceful co-existence and good relations the country," he said.

When the incidents broke out in KwaZulu-Natal, Zuma deployed Police Minister Nkosinathi Nhleko, Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba and State Security Minister David Mahlobo to work with provincial authorities to quell the violence and bring the situation to normality.

"They have done well, but the problem requires a much more comprehensive and substantive long-term intervention. I have therefore assigned the entire Justice Crime Prevention and Security Cluster to work on this issue intensively, joined by the Ministers of Social Development, Trade and Industry and Small Business Development."

Zuma said the security cluster and economic departments had already begun working on the matter following the incidents in Soweto, Gauteng in January.

"I have now directed them to work faster and to engage affected communities, organisations representing foreign nationals, business, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders to attend to the concerns raised on both sides."

He said the objective was to avoid future incidents by improving relations and promoting peaceful co-existence between citizens and "brothers and sisters within the continent, as well as other foreign nationals".

Government was also seeking cooperation from the affected foreign missions based in South Africa.

Zuma called on MPs to use their constituencies to bring normality and promote cultural tolerance and co-existence between locals and foreign nationals.

The President said the concern of illegal immigrants was being addressed through Home Affairs, and that the SA National Defence Force had been deployed to border posts to enhance security.

He called on refugees and asylum seekers to be protected, in-line with international law.

"Government will continue to play it role and fulfil our obligations as members of the African Union and the United Nations. Refugees and asylum seekers will be given support in line with international law.

"We appeal to our people to protect and support refugees and asylum seekers."

He thanked the faith-based groups and NGOs for lending humanitarian support to foreign nationals who have been displaced by the attacks.

Zuma reiterated the view that South Africans were generally not xenophobic. "If they were, we would not have such a high number of foreign nationals who have been successfully integrated into communities all over our country..."

He said the socio-economic issues raised where being attended to, such as complaints about illegal and undocumented immigrants, the increase in the number of shops or small businesses that have been taken over by foreign nationals and also perceptions that foreign nationals commit or perpetuate crime.