

SACC STATEMENT ON THE SPREADING VIOLENCE

The violent acts, burning and looting of business premises in the city centres and townships in Gauteng, have left the country in a state of shock, that things can degenerate to a point of such violence without us attending to the various underlying and causal issues.

The issues of competition for scarce employment opportunities, and the belief that foreign Africans in particular, are part of the problem, is at the core of these protests. There should be no room for criminal acts of violence against people and properties. Such acts must be condemned everywhere without equivocation. And law enforcement agencies must act swiftly to deal with criminality. People are warned that the social media messages that incite violence will not be there with you when you alone face the consequences of your violence. The book of Proverbs says: “Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.” (Proverbs 4:6)

We have become aware that of the communications circulating in social media, calling on South Africans to block Africans from other countries from entering their homes and work places. We also have become aware of the urgent communication that trucks must be halted and no deliveries as a protest against the employment of non-South Africans in the trucking industry. We have heard also of the planned retaliatory blockage of South African truck drivers delivering goods in other African countries bordering South Africa. South Africans will be attacked wherever they go in whatever capacity. South African churches like the Zion Christian Church, the Methodist Church and others, have no borders, they are in all neighbouring countries. South African church members will be bussed to other countries for their conventions. Are we ready for a trans-border conflict? We think not!! That, is a no win conflict.

There is no question that the fundamental issues and concerns must be attended in a rational manner by all role players. The South African Council of Churches appeals to all communities to desist from the violence which will land them in acts of criminality. And as we restore calm in our communities, the SACC commits to some specific acts:

1. The SACC is setting up as a matter of urgency, a task team of religious leaders to work together to find solutions to these challenges. To that end, the Task Team will engage key role players - organisations like organisation of South African truck drivers; the national taxi association - SANTACO; the Sisonke People’s Forum Hlanganani Makhosi Ohlanga; the organisations of foreign nationals and foreign traders; the law enforcement authorities and various relevant government departments. These meetings will be initiated this week, and, to allow for these processes, we call for calm in all communities.
2. On Wednesday September 4, there will be a noontime prayers service at the SACC Chapel at Khotso House, the House of Peace, active peace of solutions,. The peace we seek is not passive peace, but active peace that deals with the challenges as experienced by all.



3. Recognising that South Africans and non-South African nationals worship together in our churches, the SACC calls on churches in all communities to, beginning this week, provide space for listening to perceptions of the problems, and for creative solutions.
4. This Sunday September 8, the national leadership of the SACC will join a Johannesburg Inner City church, the Central Methodist Church, Pritchard Street, at the 14:00 afternoon service, to pray for successful solutions and to provide space for listening. All who can are invited to join this service.

Meanwhile, we have some pertinent truths that must be taken account of:

- The reality of poverty and unemployment for black South Africans is a stark reality, and it can result in some of the most inhuman acts. Poverty and unemployment should be no excuse to engage in criminal acts. We need solution-driven engagements.
- The same reality of poverty gnaws away at citizens of neighbouring countries, whose citizens have for generations been contract workers building the now shrinking South African economy.
- There is a special negative focus on African foreign nationals, which is a problematic categorisation amounting to the black on black violence of old, when we attacked each other on our tribal identities in apartheid days.
- A very great number of foreign nationals are in this country legally, as students, as traders or business people, as refugees from political persecution - something South Africans know well; as expatriate employees of South African and global companies, and even for the African Union and the United Nations. This is a fact and reality in all countries. To promote attacks and blockade of movement of all these people because they are not South African is to shoot ourselves and our international relations in the foot. In fact it may lead to retaliation against the South African economy; and we may end up with even greater stress on our capacity to sustain jobs!

The SACC supports all efforts to get to the bottom of these problems and to save the lives of affected people. But violence will not solve these problems; it will create new and even more difficult challenges for our communities and the country. You will likely be attacking someone you've greeted before, or someone you've never even met, whom you do not know. As the Bible says: "Do not plot harm against your neighbor, who lives trustfully near you. Do not accuse anyone for no reason— when they have done you no harm. Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways." (Proverbs 3:29-31)

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