



UNITED NATIONS

Office of the Resident Coordinator  
South Africa

**Situation Report 1 – VIOLENCE AGAINST FOREIGNERS – 24 MAY 2008**

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- Violence in townships against foreign nationals has claimed 42 lives (23 May 2008) and has spread to most of the country;
- According to the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC), more than 21,800 persons are currently displaced in South Africa as a result of the violence;
- Most of the displaced are currently sheltered in ad hoc relief sites at police and fire stations, churches and other public buildings;
- The Government is considering the establishment of ‘centres of safe shelter’ to assist and protect the displaced if the current level of displacement is sustained;
- Community and faith-based organisations, international NGOs, the Red Cross and UN agencies have been providing food assistance, medical and non-food items ;
- The proliferation of coordination mechanisms remains a challenge that the NDMC intends to streamline;
- Concerns remain that the violence may continue further;
- The Government is discussing durable solutions in the event of continued displacement.

**CONTEXT**

Government sources state that since the wave of attacks on foreign nationals began on 11 May, 2008, 42 people have been killed and more than 500 injured with violence now spreading to all but two provinces in South Africa. Attacks have occurred mostly at night and have targeted foreign migrants from Bangladesh, Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Zimbabwe and other countries as well as non-Zulu speaking South Africans. They appear to be increasingly coordinated and threats of attack are sometimes issued with leaflets distributed in townships<sup>1</sup>.

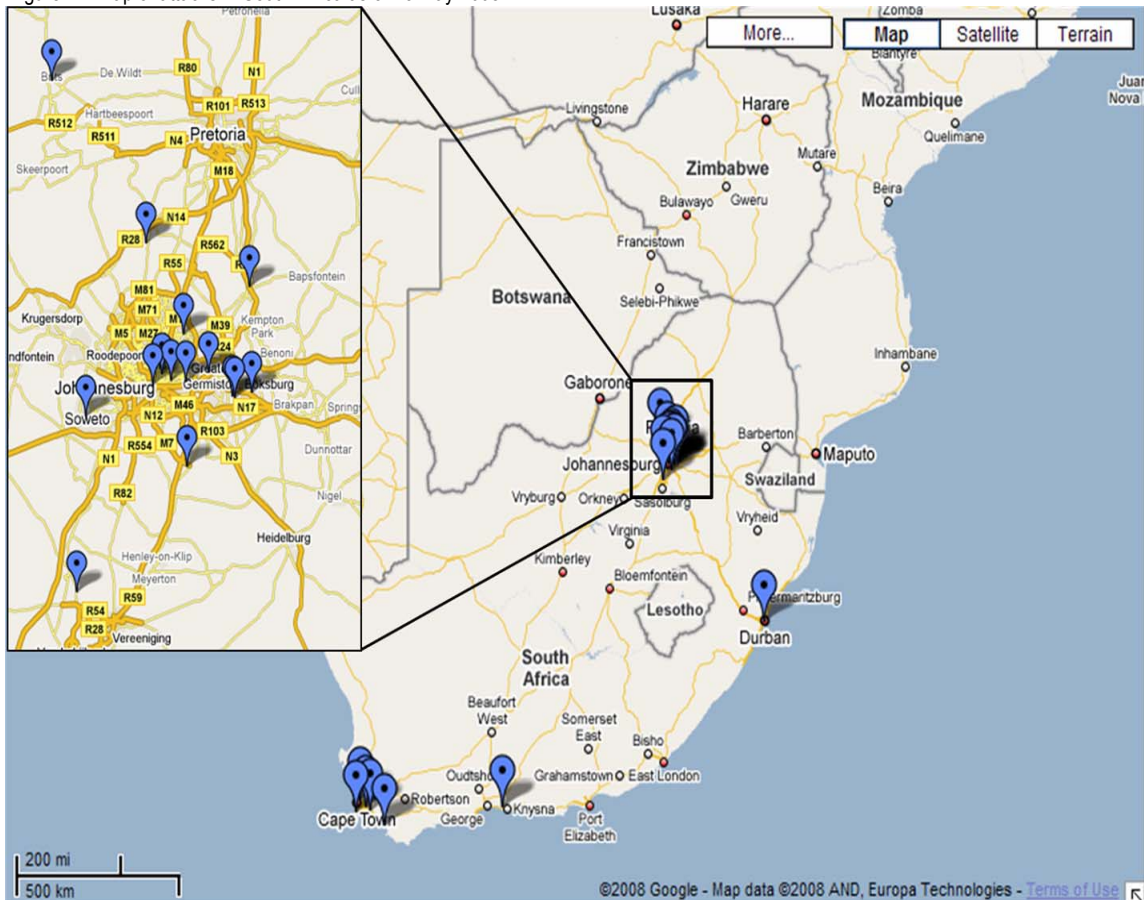
The violence began on the night of 11 May 2008, when angry mobs attacked foreign nationals and non-Zulu speaking locals in the Alexandra Township (Johannesburg metropolitan area) killing three and injuring more than 40. Several homes were also burned. Almost 1,000 people fled to the local police station for safety. Attacks were then reported in the East Rand townships of Tembisa, Thokoza and Primrose and by 18 May 2008 had reached the centre of Johannesburg. Since 21 May 2008, violence has spread to other areas of South Africa and only two provinces remain unaffected, including Limpopo and Northern Cape Province. The situation has resulted in generalized fear and anxiety throughout the country.

As a result of the attacks, many foreign nationals have fled from areas of danger to police stations for protection. The NDMC has counted more than 21,800 people displaced so far with 19,375 persons displaced in Gauteng Province, 1,573 persons in Western Cape, 800 in Mpumalanga<sup>2</sup> and 81 in Limpopo.

<sup>1</sup> According to representatives of the Diplomatic Corps, leaflets warning foreigners to leave have been circulated in Soweto and in Pretoria

<sup>2</sup> The NDMC states that it is aware that some of them might have already repatriated to Mozambique by train. See [www.ndmc.gov.za](http://www.ndmc.gov.za)

Figure 1 – Map of attacks in South Africa as of 23 May 2008



Source (Google map and data on incidents from [www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com))

In Gauteng Province, where most of the violence has occurred so far, displaced foreigners have settled at 48 locations, including outside police stations, health facilities and empty communal buildings under the protection of the South African Police Services (SAPS). According to the NDMC, 45% (8,550 persons) of the total displaced are in the East Rand (Erkhuleni metropolitan municipality) and another 15% (3,000 persons) in the Johannesburg metropolitan area. A further but unknown number of people are displaced and living with family and community members away from areas where violence has occurred. Some agency estimate that number is in the order of a further 20-30,000 people. Secondary displacement has also occurred over the last few days from Johannesburg to Pretoria.

The magnitude of the violence has overstretched the SAPS. Additional police officers have been redeployed to hotspots but the increasing spread of the violence to other Provinces has meant that police units cannot be withdrawn from other areas. On 21 May 2008, President Thabo Mbeki approved the deployment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to areas hit by violence to provide a supporting role to the SAPS. According to the South African press, the SANDF have up to 900 soldiers and two Oryx helicopters in Gauteng Province.

Protecting foreign nationals is proving to be a challenge as many are in South Africa illegally and fear being recognized and deported by the authorities. The Ministry of Home Affairs has informed that both documented and un-documented foreigners would not be deported and consideration is being given to the granting of temporary residence permits to those threatened/attacked (i.e. a moratorium), although deportations of illegal migrants apprehended before the outbreak of violence continue.

The continuing violence has also pushed many migrants to return to their home country. According to Mozambican border authorities, up to 10,000 nationals have returned home since 11 May 2008. Mozambique and Malawi have instructed their embassies in South Africa to support the repatriation of nationals fleeing the attacks. According to IOM, there have not as yet been assisted voluntary returns but at least 1,000 people have reportedly returned home to Zimbabwe by themselves on commercial buses over the last few days.

## NATIONAL RESPONSE

Until recently, the Government has downplayed the xenophobic nature of the attacks and has placed most of the blame on criminal elements. Civil society and faith-based organisations already assisting the swelling numbers of illegal immigrants in Johannesburg (particularly Zimbabweans) have been the first line of response but have limited capacity to address the greater needs caused by displacement and have lacked the coordination of official government structures.

Assistance has concentrated around the places to which migrants have fled, including police stations, health clinics in townships and empty municipal property. National and international humanitarian organisations have assisted with providing for the most immediate needs, such as bedding, tents, food and hygiene kits. More non-food items (NFI) and more durable shelter solutions are needed.

On 16 May 2008, the South Africa Red Cross Society (SARCS) issued an appeal for ZAR 1 million (around US\$ 133,000) for the provision of emergency relief to those affected by the violence and to launch an anti-discrimination campaign. They have received ZAR 3 million against this appeal from Standard Bank.

The NDMC is leading the response, while awaiting confirmation of its operational mandate from the Cabinet, which meets next on Monday 26 May 2008. Gauteng Province is currently considering whether to declare a provincial state of emergency. Local Joint Operation Cells (JOC) have been established in areas where the displaced have settled. The local JOCs are being coordinated by a Provincial JOC chaired by the NDMC, which is expected to become the main interface with international humanitarian organisations. Liaison with civil society and community-based organisations is expected to be managed by the Department of Social Development and feed into Provincial JOCs.

In response to the crisis, the Government is exploring the possibility of establishing "Centres of Safe Shelter" (CoSS) to which those currently displaced would be moved. Current planning is considering the creation of a number of CoSSs at several sites if the current levels of displacement are sustained. The UN community is currently exploring the manner in which to support the government. There are concerns about the potential for any new shelter sites to be pull factors for existing vulnerable populations, which might hamper a viable exit strategy.

## INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

UNHCR are monitoring the prevailing situation in locations where the displaced foreigners have sought refuge. The refugee organization has distributed 4,000 blankets and 2,000 sleeping mats through local implementing partners. Further, it has developed a project proposal to respond to the urgent needs of the most vulnerable migrants (documented and undocumented) in dispersed locations. It has also allocated additional funds to its traditional implementing partners including the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) to assist refugees and asylum seekers who have been affected and displaced.

UNICEF has delivered emergency supplies to the South African Red Cross and the City of Johannesburg Migration Desk. It is procuring 1,500 hygiene kits, which will be available and distributed by 28 May 2008. An additional 7,600 disposable nappies are also expected to be procured by the end of next week. Emergency programme funds are being sought to procure and distribute infant formula, baby cereal and NFI and to provide psychosocial and educational activities.

WHO has begun looking into health requirements and has been tasked to explore specific requirements for both preventative and curative actions to address HIV/AIDS.

IOM is providing 2,500 NFI kits, including 500 for children with half going to the provincial Department of Safety for people in Germiston, while the other half will be provided to the SARC depot in Germiston for distribution elsewhere. Meanwhile, IOM continues to convene country-level Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) coordination meetings.

OCHA will support the UN Resident Coordinator in coordinating IASC support to the government-led response.

OXFAM is operating in 12 sites in Gauteng to provide food, NFIs and emergency sanitation. It further reports that a local level coordination group for food has been established.

The South African Council of Churches is providing food and blankets at several sites. Its appeal will focus on food and support to infant needs.

MSF is operating in 20 sites to provide medical assistance using mobile facilities as well as limited NFIs including blankets.

SARC, supported by IFRC, is operating in 12 sites to assist with food, NFI and cash grants. ICRC are also procuring 15,000 blankets for them.

## NEEDS

Suitable shelter and warm clothing for winter are the priority for the displaced population. In addition, there is also a reported lack of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) for people with HIV/AIDS.

Protection is of mounting concern as areas of displacement are overcrowded.

There is an immediate need to rationalize coordination structures in order to systematically identify needs, gaps and required capacities. This is particularly relevant at the local level where the NDMC has already recognized that it does not have the capacity to staff all local JOCs. These needs are currently being addressed and an IASC coordination framework is in place. In the coming days, its relationship in support of the government-led response will be clarified.

Information management is another gap, which is currently being addressed. The NDMC has requested UN assistance in training staff deployed or appointed to the local JOCs to collect appropriate indicators and data that would allow better analysis and targeting, while the UN system is putting in place an inter-agency information sharing system managed by OCHA.

Given the light footprint of the UN and the UNCT in South Africa and the lack of established relief programmes and organizations, there may also be a need to increase aid delivery capacities.

Although South Africa is a medium income country, the government may require international support to kick-start operations until its own systems and structures are in place.

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END

## Timeline: Xenophobic attacks spread throughout South Africa

