

INAUGURAL PUBLIC LECTURE ON XENOPHOBIA



Skilled Foreign Nationals in South Africa

Leveraging Skills to add Value through Partnerships...

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Artscape Theatre, Cape Town

POST-EVENT REPORT



Skilled Foreign Nationals in South Africa

Leveraging Skills to add Value through Partnerships...

Beyond Xenophobia: Pan-Africanism, Globalization and the Challenges of Migration and Migration Policy in a Post-apartheid South Africa¹



The Public Lecture attracted over 200 people from all walks of life, and it was given a broad media coverage before and after the event. The guest speakers cut across all the major sectors of the society; from the business community, civil society organizations, academia and the government.

This post-event report summarizes the highlights of the speeches delivered by some of the speakers at the public lecture, and it extracts salient information that could be useful for further public dialogue and policy recommendation.



Honourable Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Ms Fatima Chohan, delivering the keynote address

¹ Please see the annexure for the event's programme and SFONSA's aims and objectives

“Xenophobia must be discussed in the corridors of power and government, in the board rooms of big business, in the kraals and assemblies of royal and traditional leaders, in the lecture halls of institutions of higher learning and the factory floors of vehicle assembly plants. It must be discussed amongst labourers working in fields across the country - small and medium business enterprises and operators at community level - churches - mosques - and the classrooms where young minds are receptive and shaped - and every other place in between”



The organizers of the public lecture and all the guest speakers commend the Department of Home Affairs for launching the inaugural South African Migrants Awards, whose objectives include honouring and recognising outstanding migrants, residing in South Africa, who make an immense contribution to South Africa’s development in their various fields of expertise. This, amongst many other initiatives, clearly shows that the South African government is keen on promoting tolerance, social cohesion and integration in South Africa.



Dr. Fanie Du Toit, Executive Director, Institute for Justice and Reconciliation

*According to the representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are over 13 million refugees in the world. South Africa has some 65,000 recognized refugees and another 249,000 asylum-seekers. Contrary to what some believe, South Africa is not the country in Africa hosting the most refugees. In fact, Ethiopia hosts the highest number of refugees in Africa, with a total of 590,000 and Kenya hosts 560,000. UNHCR believes Xenophobia is an issue that must be spoken about, **boldly** and **fearlessly**.*



(a)



(b)

(a) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Patrick Kawuma, (b) Premier Hellen Zille

The public lecture emphasizes the fact that Refugees and Skilled Foreign Nationals make positive contributions to South African Development and Economy. Many professional refugees bring with them wealth of knowledge and experience that can benefit the South African economy. It is sad however to find qualified professionals like Nurses, Math & Sciences Teachers working as car guards as the professional bodies of their trade have made it virtually impossible for these skilled refugees to formally enroll in their respective professions in the country of asylum.

“Skilled Foreign Nationals in South Africa have significant roles to play in building a more cohesive society”.



President of the Skilled Foreign Nationals in South Africa (SFONSA), Mr. Steve Arowolo, delivering his welcome address at the public lecture

South Africans of all race groups agree that inequality is the number one obstacle to reconciliation. We also need to acknowledge the fact that the subtle prejudices and biases on which apartheid had been built still exists, towards foreigners, and towards one another—circulating in the form of stories to support stereotypical views of others (allowed by many simply to go unchallenged). These stories and forms of racism and xenophobia provide the quiet backdrop to systematic and systemic failures to build cohesion, whether from national or provincial government, or indeed from local government or civil society embedded in the communities where life

is tougher than ever before, where competition is high and the stakes even higher.

“Immigration is everyone’s business... We should all see it as part of our civic obligations...”



We have a problem and we will not solve it with slogans like “Say No to Xenophobia”. The challenge is to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening, why it is happening and to develop an orderly and consistent immigration policy, to manage our borders effectively and speak to other African leaders about the **push** coming from their countries. This is could be a problem of **Pull** and **Push** and we have to deal with both.



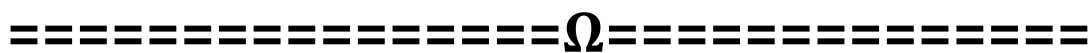
President of the Cape Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ms Janine Myburgh

Policy recommendations and the way forward...

1. *Understanding the problem – accurate data* - There is a need for research on migration and the numbers of foreigners living in South Africa so the role of foreign nationals in the employment markets, particularly the low-skill, low-income workforce, is better understood. Such data will answer a fundamental question: What influence do migration and intercultural exchange have for the economy and cultures? Research should also focus on the aspect of violence. What is causing poor South African to rise against other poor Africans? The research should also suggest ways to look at key questions like: why does South Africa seem to be such a very violent society? Without blaming “criminal elements” for it all.
2. *Immigration policy and integration* – South African needs clear and concise immigration policies that address who comes into the country, and how, and how those who arrive in this country are better integrated into society. In particular, there is the need to develop the latter - integration policies. Currently, integration is left in the hands of local communities who have limited understanding of foreign nationals and why they are in this country. A participant pointed out that there are several cases of international best practice for immigration policy and foreign national integration that the country can benchmark against, and even emulate. Integration and immigration policies should take into account economic, resources and urban planning constraints.
3. *Foreign policy* – The immigration and integration policies should be based on a more coherent foreign policy that should pave the way for South Africa to play a stronger role in peace making and security matters on the African continent. Disrupted societies and ensuing migration are in most cases a result of conflict, war and poverty. There is also an economic angle that must be addressed in that people tend to migrate to where there are jobs so there is an opportunity for more multilateral and bilateral agreements between South Africa and African countries, and between African countries, that should accommodate programmes aimed at trade and entrepreneurial skills exchanges so that inter-African exchange is

fostered on all levels of society. The foreign policy aims should ultimately be to create opportunities for cultural and economic exchanges between South Africa and the rest of Africa and should lead to possibilities and a perceived win-win situation on both sides of the South African border.

4. *Education* – learners need to learn about other African countries, their people and cultures, geopolitics and histories. The best way to achieve this is to promote a more inclusive and Africentric syllabus. This will assist the broader public and society at large to better understand foreigners in South Africa and why they are in South Africa. A further suggestion was to actively promote and organise more widespread peer-learning opportunities for High School learners that overcome cross-cultural, class and race divides.



“Government needs to support community leadership. Community leadership plays a crucial role in developing and driving positive change at a grassroots level...”



- *The role of communities and community leadership* – government needs to support community leadership. Community leadership plays a crucial role in developing and driving positive change at a grassroots level. Even where xenophobia is not endemic in certain communities, they face challenges. The example of Masiphumelele in the Western Cape in 2008 has shown that violence can be prevented when communities take it upon themselves to counter divisive narratives. However, now Masiphumelele is facing an increased influx of foreigners because it is known that foreigners will not be attacked. This aspect puts more and more pressure on the socioeconomic realities of people living in the township. It is important for government, institutions and people living in better-off areas to understand that an influx of foreigners into already challenging living conditions will make tensions rise. Government and society need to put more effort into understanding the socio-economic dynamics of poor communities, in essence, how the ‘local

economy functions' and how tensions build up so proactive interventions are possible. Assisting communities to set up representative structures that will help them gather community intelligence ahead of escalations of tensions are suggested. The key is to make local communities the heart of any intervention strategy.

- *The role of business* – the outbreak of xenophobic violence stems in large part from competition for strategic resources. *Our businesses are exceptionally cash-rich. What is their responsibility within the current climate?* Townships have their own economy. It is crucial to understand these and the hierarchies and class issues that come along with the localised economy. Locally owned businesses in impoverished areas are often outperformed by businesses run by immigrants due to better business practises and knowledge. This creates tensions. How does this happen, is a key question, and what can/should be done about this, is another. In addition, it is important for both government and those who run successful businesses to aid in up-skilling and teaching business acumen at the grassroots community level so locally owned businesses can better compete if a lack of skills among local entrepreneurs is identified as a key problem in the relative performances of local and foreign-owned businesses. Successful business owners, local or foreign, should be encouraged to join local business community forums as a way of offering expertise and guidance.
- *The role of policing* – the breakdown of law and order creates the conditions whereby isolated incidents of violence can spread rapidly. The police need to respond swiftly and efficiently to incidents against foreigners. To guard against perceived impunity, the courts need to ensure timely and decisive convictions. Furthermore, it is important that the police act in a way to protect vulnerable and marginalised immigrant communities and do not themselves contribute to xenophobia by stereotyping, profiling and thereby making unlawful or unjustifiable arrests. Overall, effective policing is crucial for citizens to feel safe and to trust in the rule of law. Zero tolerance for policy brutality and corruption among police will contribute to safer communities.

- *The role of foreigners – foreign nationals should be encouraged to integrate by contributing, either by offering business skills training programmes or more extensively employing local people. Such a proactive sharing of knowledge, experience and culture improves the perception of foreign nationals in local communities as they are seen to add value, and this can also increase locals’ understanding of the role of foreign nationals in their communities.*
- *The role of the media – media has an important role to play to counter xenophobia in South Africa by offering accurate narratives, and through educating people about refugees and immigrants, their difficulties and plight, and their contributions. At the same time, media should also look into how to include more insightful reports from, and about, Africa so people are more aware of the conflicts and challenges on the continent and their implications for migrants, travellers, and foreigners in their midst. Finally, media needs to constantly ensure that it remains sensitive when it report on violence.*
- *The role of individuals in South Africa -*
 - *Have difficult conversations – linked to the topic of woundedness and trauma, South Africans must begin to have difficult, honest and open conversations about race, racism, white privilege, xenophobia, and the social capital of a white skin. Online slanging matches cannot create a sense of unity.*
 - *Do not talk about the issue from the outside - debates and engagements should take place within township communities, not outside of them. It is easy for outsiders to propose solutions if they stand outside the lived realities on the ground.*
 - *Citizens of the middle and upper class – get involved and take responsibility to fight poverty and structural issues that are faced by the poor every day. To stand up when a crisis is happening is reactionary. Engage with and actively contribute to solutions before anger and violence set in.*

- *Understand your country* – act consistently and constantly, not only when a situation demands it. Participate on an ongoing basis to contribute to change in South Africa.



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