

Pietermaritzburg says no to xenophobia

#Pmbsaysnotoxenophobia

15 April 2015

An ad hoc group of people living in Pietermaritzburg met on Wednesday night deeply concerned about incidents of xenophobia in our town. We came from a range of non-governmental organisations, faith-based initiatives, solidarity campaigns and academic units. It is critical to say that, like the majority of people living in 'Maritzburg, we believe that hatred and violence against fellow human beings is wrong.

There are undoubtedly very serious challenges facing us a country, and many of these challenges and frustrations are most desperate for the poor and the unemployed. Dealing with these underlying crises is our collective, urgent and ongoing responsibility. But allowing that frustration to be channelled into violence against people who are here from other countries is wrong in principle and wrong in practice.

From the reports we received, it is clear there are deep levels of fear across our community. Groups of 'foreign nationals' gather together fearing large-scale attacks; 'locals' gather together in impoverished township locations fearing the imagined actions of organised foreigners; suburbanites gather together wondering 'who's next'. Fears feed on themselves and generate rumours that can be unfounded or exaggerated. It is clear there are too few spaces for dealing with our fears across the boundaries that divide us, and for listening to and hearing each other in order to start addressing the sources underlying those fears.

In the coming days we will be taking concrete and symbolic actions to support those working for peace and dialogue and to reign in the threat of xenophobia urgently. We're counting on the support of the people of our town to say loud and clear: "Pmb says no to xenophobia".