

# South African police fire on protesting foreign nationals

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On April 8, South African police fired stun grenades and teargas at 300 foreign nationals gathered at Curries Fountain in central Durban, KwaZulu-Natal province.

Protesters were preparing for a march against xenophobic attacks in the province. They were initially due to march before Easter, but police forced the postponement of that event.

The News24 web site reported: “eThekweni Metro Police spokesperson Superintendent Eugene Msomi said the group had applied for permission to march on Wednesday [April 8], and it had been granted.”

However, once marchers had gathered in the morning police cancelled the march. They claimed there was an imminent threat to the group, the same reason cited for postponing the march planned before the Easter break.

On the night of April 7, according to *Business Day*, yet another march in Durban “by hundreds of foreigners against xenophobic attacks ... was cancelled at the eleventh hour after a crowd of taxi drivers and unemployed youth threatened to attack them.”

Police fired rubber bullets and teargas into the crowd.

Anti-xenophobia marchers gathered in defiance of the latest cancellation. About 30 riot police blocked their path, hosing them with water cannon and firing teargas as the group progressed towards them.

After several clashes with police, some marchers arrived at Durban City Hall where they were met by Willies Mchunu, KwaZulu-Natal provincial cabinet member for community safety and liaison. Surrounded by a phalanx of riot police, Mchunu cynically called for calm.

“We are ready to listen to all of your concerns and address them and that is important to us,” he said. “[The provincial government] need to explain what we are trying to do with the present situation.”

Mchunu added, “I have just come from Isipingo and

I don’t understand why people are saying that the government is doing nothing.”

About 350 foreign nationals sought refuge at the Isipingo police station following an outbreak of violence against them on Easter Monday. This was after Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini criticised foreigners for changing South African society and, he claimed, enjoying wealth that rightfully belonged to locals.

A man named only as Themba in the *Sowetan* of April 2 told the newspaper he had participated in the attacks on foreigners. “We are saying enough is enough,” he said. “Even the king is saying these people must go back to their countries so that we can get back our jobs.”

The South African Human Rights Commission is investigating the king for sparking the violence with his statements. Zwelithini made his remarks in what the IOL web site described as a “moral regeneration” event in Pongola late last month.

According to IOL, Durban-based Congolese national Shako Kuminga said the king’s statement came while his compatriots were mourning deaths caused by a series of xenophobic attacks. “His countryman Noel Beya Dinshistia ... was doused in a flammable substance before being set alight,” the web site reported.

Kuminga said the attackers were South Africans. “Every week a Congolese is attacked in this city,” he added. “My wife was stabbed in the Point area yesterday.”

In his fulminations in Pongola, Zwelithini berated political leaders for being too afraid to tell South Africans “the truth.” Police Minister Nkosinathi Nhleko and Mchunu were politely seated in the audience.

“I have to talk about this because I am the king. I

don't have to wait for five years [for votes]," Zwelithini boasted. "As the king of the Zulu nation and among those who liberated this country, the time has come for me to say I'm fed up to be led by [political leaders] who cannot express themselves."

Zwelithini speaks for the most backward ethnic elements and certain bourgeois layers. He is a cousin of Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Zulu-dominated Inkatha Freedom Party since its formation in 1975. Buthelezi defended Zwelithini's remarks.

In 2012 the king asked the KwaZulu-Natal government for 18 million rand (US\$1.53 million) for a new compound, including a R6 million palace for his sixth and youngest wife, Queen Zola KaMafu. She first made headlines in 2004 when as a 14-year-old she accompanied the king, then 56, to the opening of the provincial legislature.

The opposition Democratic Alliance called in December 2014 for a comprehensive audit of the "reckless" expenditure of the Zulu royal household. According to media reports, it had by then spent the R54 million allocated to it by the KwaZulu-Natal provincial legislature for the 2014/15 fiscal year beginning on April 1 and requested "top-up" funding of a further R10 million.

The *Sunday Times* reported that the king had spent R10,000 on his birthday cake and R120,000 on crockery. The household budget included R10.3 million for the upkeep of palaces and R2.2 million in stipends for his wives.

Zwelithini's chauvinistic comments have been echoed by high-ranking ANC members for similar political aims.

Responding to the outbreak of xenophobic violence in February, Small Business Development Minister Lindiwe Zulu said, "Foreigners need to understand that they are here as a courtesy and our priority is to the people of this country first and foremost. ... It's important for the foreigners to share with the South Africans ... what it is that makes it possible for them to be successful."

Water Affairs Minister Nomvula Mokonyane on January 2 posted a Facebook status that read in part, "Almost every second outlet or even former general dealer shops are run by people of Somali or Pakistani origin in a yard that we know who the original owners were ...

"I am not xenophobic, fellow comrades and friends, but this is a recipe for disaster which I will raise with the authorities relevant ...

"This phenomenon needs a coherent formal attention. Our townships cannot be a site of subtle takeover and build up for other situations we have seen in other countries. I am ready to state my view formally in defence of our communities."

The forces directing enmity against foreigners seek to turn attention away firstly from the responsibility of the rapacious South Africa bourgeoisie in condemning millions to poverty while they, along with their political servants, wallow in luxury.

It is also a useful device for turning attention away from the factional battles tearing apart the African National Congress (ANC), nationally and in the province.

In the KwaZulu-Natal ANC's recent, chaotic regional conference, restive branches mounted a challenge that delivered a shock to delegates who before were solidly behind President Jacob Zuma.

The bitter contest for control of KwaZulu-Natal, the ANC's biggest region and therefore indispensable to Zuma's national dominance, led to the conference being twice postponed because of violence among delegates. At least three party members were shot dead in the lead-up to the conference. The results were greeted with protests and marches, and nullified in early March after three branches were found to have participated improperly.



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