

We cannot accept ourselves if we accept xenophobia

 By [Lulu White-Raheem](#)

29 Apr 2015

Self-hate is one of the biggest reasons for the burning scourge of xenophobia that we are currently dealing with in South Africa. That said, we have done enough talking as a country and we need more decisive action in curbing the criminality of the attacks.

The implementation of SA immigration policies seem to be designed to make the average black foreign national feel like a common criminal. In public spaces such as CBDs and transit networks, one often hears of police stopping people and vehicles, in order to interrogate those who may have a darker complexion of their origins. Thus one often sees the maltreatment of black foreign nationals as institutionalised. One can see this influencing the behaviour of others, who tend to assume the worst of foreign nationals, resulting in them being looked at with suspicion. However, the mere justification of this abhorrent act is insulting. On a human level, killing or attacking one for being different cannot be justifiable.



Forging relationships

Multi-disciplinary partnerships, led by the government through its security cluster, African embassies and the SA Human Rights Commission is required to fight the xenophobia and bring perpetrators of attacks and intimidation to account. This partnership, through forming a staunch voice condemning the actions can inspire active citizenry from both foreign nationals and South African citizens.

It is very important that the government also takes leadership in this matter by not only condemning the actions of the attackers, but also by forging relationships with grass root level organisations that can directly enhance relations between locals and foreign nationals. Platforms for cultural exchange at a grass root level can serve to educate our South Africans on the lives of the foreign nationals, our joint history and the complex socio-economic pushes that have led many of them to seek opportunities in South Africa.

These collaborations and organisations can also play a direct role in effectively integrating legal foreigners into local communities. Local community members will also be given an opportunity to help foster this integration, thus helping to demystify the fear that currently exists between South Africans and foreign national communities. Often, people fear what they don't understand and this can be redressed through facilitated education and training.

Responsibility of the media

The role of the media is important as through its actions, a narrative is created, supported and maintained. There needs to be a concerted effort from the media that addresses the negative images and messages that are published when there is communication on foreign nationals. One often comes across articles about crimes, describing the perpetrators according to their country of origin. When these are foreign national, such descriptions only serves to reinforce the negative stereotypes that people may already have. Thus this positioning and messaging, which is often negative, only serves to exacerbate the situation and the existing stereotypes that have led to these continuous attacks.

Lastly, service delivery protest and frustrations from locals need to be addressed. The ticking time bomb has exploded. We now see barbaric xenophobic attacks as a reflection of the anger felt by those who have become dis-enfranchised. Lawlessness and death are sinking in the mire of the government's tardy reaction and lack of service delivery. The people are speaking, loudly and brutally - our government needs to take note of the needs of local citizens who are tired of only seeing political parties during campaign season and have them shortly disappear after elections.

South Africa, together with its African counterparts has worked too hard and long to let this ruin its diplomatic relations within the continent. We are all Africans; we are because of our fellow African brothers and sisters. As a key partner in the African Union and the United Nations Security Cluster, it is very important that a long lasting harmonious relationship is maintained with all the countries on the continent. We cannot be accepting of the attacks, whether through a lack of response or tardy response, as it reflects a rejection of our own values, aspirations and morals.

ABOUT LULU WHITE-RAHEEM

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