

UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN S.A.
General Synod
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PRESS RELEASE: XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS ON REFUGEES

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) hereby wishes to express our feelings and experience with regard to the current attacks on refugees in South Africa.

Since the dawn of our democracy, many people from other parts of our continent flocked to this land, because they saw a bright new light arising on the horizon of Africa's last oppressive colony. They felt, given their own dire situation, they could share that new day with their brothers and sisters in South Africa. Since many South Africans, many of them prominent leaders in government, including our President, were once refugees in many a foreign land during apartheid, this assumption on their side, was a valid one.

As refugees (economic and political refugees), they became stateless people. People without legal status.

Apart from the fact that many of the nations these refugees come from, provided support and comfort in their own countries for us, their representatives fought for our cause in World Forums, like the UN, the frontline states and other African Institutions. We derived comfort in our liberation struggle from the fact that these fellow Africans advanced our cause.

Against this background the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa condemns the xenophobic attacks against a defenseless people in the strongest possible terms. This certainly is not a way we pay back a favor conferred on us, when we were in need. This is not the way we deal with fellow human beings, created in the image of God, in their deepest need. These shameful actions bring disgrace to a proud nation such as ours. This senseless wasting of precious life through brutal and deadly attacks is the work of cowards. No decent human being with moral values treats another person like this. There is no justification at all for this kind of inhumane behaviour. What happened during the past couple of days and continuous to happen, is a sign of how low some of us can sink.

We call on Christians in general, but on members of URCSA in particular, to remember that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was once a refugee, who fled with his parents from the land of His birth. Anyone who follows and believes in this Christ, will treat refugees with the outmost respect and dignity. As Christ became stateless and homeless, so did the refugees in our midst. We must have compassion with them, as Christ had compassion on us. When they suffer their pain, bewilderment and uncertainty it must also touch our own lives. We are bound together in a common humanity.

We call on all our members to act in this matter in the spirit of our Belhar Confession "God sides with the poor and the oppressed and the Church must stand where God stands.

As a Church we have no choice, but driven and compelled by our faith, especially our faith expressed in our Belhar Confession, we must stand where God stands, against the injustices and with those who have been wronged.

We call on all our members and Congregations in the areas where these attacks on refugees occur to act in the spirit of the Belhar Confession. We call on our members and congregations to assist in the various needs that these brothers and sisters of us may have. Pray for them and their perpetrators constantly. We also pray for a speedy resolution to this problem and we ask the whole of URCSA to join us.

We call on government and the relevant security forces to secure the safety of the refugees and to look into the facts behind this scourge of attacks as a matter of utmost urgency, preventing further damage to them and to the image of our nation.

Issued on this the 20th day of May 2008, by Rev Daniel Kuys (Media Spokesperson for the Moderamen/ Executive of the General Synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa)