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IRR
South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

Media enquiries: Michael Morris Tel: 066 302 1968 Email: michael@irr.org.za;
Kelebogile Leepile Tel: 011 482 7221 ext: 2018 Email: kelebogile@irr.org.za

Xenophobic violence reflects absence of policy reform, combined with reckless racial nationalism - IRR

The latest outbreak of xenophobic conflict is very serious and every effort must be made to prevent it from getting out of hand, as happened in 2008 at such tragic cost.

There can be little doubt that the events of recent days reflect the mounting desperation of people both in South Africa and elsewhere in southern Africa who are bearing the brunt of the consequences of the absence of reform, and the continuing reckless flirtation with racial nationalism by politicians across the spectrum.

The governing ANC's continuing commitment to counterproductive policy that is hostile to investment, economic growth and job creation is the primary source of declining socio-economic conditions that provide fertile ground for resentment and frustration. The same is true, for example, of Zanu-PF in Zimbabwe, where stalled reform has led to grave economic difficulties and rising anger.

The risks of such frustration leading to acts of violent xenophobia – and, conversely, the proliferation of fake news purporting to show violent attacks and which only increase tensions – are all the greater in an atmosphere of heightened racial nationalism that encourages the scapegoating of sections of society.

Ultimately, the solution lies in repealing race-based legislation, securing property rights, and deregulating the labour market to position South Africa as an investment-friendly economy capable of lifting growth, creating jobs and guaranteeing its future as a free, open and prosperous society for all.

More urgently, political leaders – and all South Africans – must take a firm public stand against xenophobic sentiment and reject the racial nationalism that sponsors it.

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