

# Press Release

## For immediate release

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### **SA at risk of a repeat of 2008 xenophobia crisis – IRR**

Mob violence in Johannesburg and elsewhere in Gauteng highlights once again the consequences of governance and economic failure.

In common with several previous outbreaks of mob violence – notably the deadly 2008 riots that claimed 62 lives – the current wave seems to embody a strong element of xenophobia. The premises of foreign businesspeople appear to have been a particular target.

In this respect, it must be noted that senior figures in leadership positions at municipal, provincial and national levels have made reckless comments which could stir hostility. A mere week ago, Gauteng premier David Makhura indicated that his administration intended to stop foreigners from operating particular types of businesses.

However, the IRR cautions against ascribing the ongoing violence solely to xenophobia. Rather, as it argued in 2008, what is at play is a toxic brew of frustration caused by unmet socio-economic aspirations, rising unemployment, grinding poverty and failing service provision.

This is exacerbated by the chronic failure of the rule of law. Premier Makhura responded to the violence by declaring that ‘we live in a law-governed society and any act of criminality shall be dealt with decisively and swiftly, regardless of nationality’. Sadly, this is often not the case, and malfeasant behaviour is often conspicuously unsanctioned – sometimes at very senior level. A disregard for the law is the inevitable outcome.

On top of this is the highly divisive style of politics employed by some politicians and endorsed by many commentators. Appeals to racial nationalism act to legitimise hostility towards, and the scapegoating of, 'others' – it should come as no surprise when the same debased logic is applied to an ever-widening circle of outsider groups.

Dealing with violence such as is now plaguing the country's commercial capital – prominently on display as the World Economic Forum convenes in Cape Town – demands that constructive and productive economic policies be put in place to offer the country's people a place in the economy. It requires that governance failures be addressed through, above all, a proper professionalization of the civil service. It makes the proper application of the law and the rule of law non-negotiable. And it calls for leadership to measure its conduct and not inflame passions that will ultimately be ruinous for society as a whole.

**Ends**