

The University of the Western Cape condemns xenophobia

21 April 2015

The University of the Western Cape (UWC) condemns in the strongest terms the recent xenophobic violence that has ravaged parts of our country and caused so much pain and suffering to so many innocent people. Xenophobia in all its forms has no place in a democratic South Africa and we call on the leaders of our country to purposeful do everything in their power to end the violence and, most importantly, address its underlying causes. As a national university alert to our African and international context and building on our proud history in South Africa's liberation struggle, we remain deeply committed to building a society where diversity in all its manifestations is respected and celebrated and where we are united by a common humanity.

Considering South Africa's violent history of brutality and prejudice, these attacks are even more shameful. South Africa's democracy has been shaped by the efforts and goodwill of people from many nations – particularly from other African countries. Many of our neighbours on the Continent played an integral role in South Africa's struggle for democracy, not only providing asylum and a place of safety for political refugees, but also, actively supporting the anti-apartheid struggle and its organisations. This support meant that they were consistently on the receiving end of the brutality of the apartheid security forces and their attempts to destabilise the continent.

Today, these countries and their citizens continue to play a crucial role in the development of South Africa's democracy. As a university the intellectual project that we seek to take forward is enriched in many different ways by our staff and students from these countries and through our research partnerships with our sister universities across the continent.

Let us remember and practise the teachings of UWC's former Chancellor, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, of the Xhosa Proverb, Umntu ngumntu ngabantu. This means, "a person is a person because of other people." Lest we forget the spirit of Ubuntu and the spirit of reciprocal living that brightly envelops a community in healing energy radiating from the hearts of interdependent human spirits sharing, loving and kindness.

UWC is very proud of the way in which our students and staff have responded to these events - especially those students who held a silent demonstration yesterday in protest against what has been happening in our country. To encourage further engagement on the matter, UWC's School of Government hosted a seminar entitled "Xenophobia in South Africa: African immigrants' perspectives and challenges". We will continue to provide opportunities for the UWC community to engage with these concerns and speak out against xenophobia and its consequences.

UWC reiterates our Chancellor, Dr Thabo Makgoba's sentiments, when he said, "Please pray for an end to xenophobia and for tolerance. Let us be voices of reason, acknowledging the anxiety and desperation which leads to attacks on foreigners. Let us look at sustainable ways of removing the conditions which cause these attacks and each commit ourselves to one act of witness to change the situation".

Professor Tyrone Pretorius

Rector and Vice-Chancellor

(On behalf of the University of the Western Cape's Campus Community)

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