

Urgent Need to Preserve African *Ubuntuism* and Integration

The Zimbabwe Universities Vice Chancellors Association (ZUVCA) is deeply shocked by the disturbing xenophobia / *Afrophobia* that is taking place in South Africa and its implications for both current and future regional and continental socio-economic development and integration.

ZUVCA strongly believe in the inviolability and sanctity of human dignity and the right to life. Freedom of involvement and human mobility are the hallmarks of opportunity and the agents through which progressive change has been achieved in our lifetime. Indeed it was through cross-border movement and exile politics that African Independence was born. The growing wave xenophobic violence spits in the face of the Pan-African dream and takes us back to the dark-ages of apartheid terrorism where human life was worth nothing. Africans cannot afford self-hatred or forget the sacrosanct principle belying *ubuntuism* that human life is a resource worth tapping into and investing in. African anti-apartheid solidarity invested in South African human potential to triumph against all forces of racially inspired evil. Today South African Universities, for example, hold a monopoly of the 5 best universities on the continent, because it has become a melting pot drawing upon the best minds from across Africa and the world. That alone bears testimony on how African genius can be nurtured and celebrated by defying the restrictions to movement imposed by colonial borders on the mobility of people and exchange of ideas.

Ironically, the heinous acts are being perpetrated when our countries are signatories to both the Arusha Convention and SADC Protocol on Education, which seek to achieve transferability and comparability of

qualifications in our region. Moreover, in our Higher and Tertiary Education landscape it is common knowledge that the human resource knows no geographical boundaries and rides on the notion that there is enough for us all if only we demonstrate initiative, innovativeness and imagination to extend the frontiers of knowledge that is beneficial to us as a people.

Regrettably, the absurdity of this whole onslaught on fellow defenseless and marginalized Africans on the basis of mobility, smacks of a society that is trapped in its own ethnocentric confines, a society that is choosing not to listen to any other voices of reason and that is largely underplaying the implications of bigger picture issues on African *ubuntuism* and development.

It is alarmingly unfortunate that the harassment and gruesome attacks on fellow human beings by their own African brothers and sisters are being based more on perceived than real differences created by borders that are a legacy of colonial constructs. Furthermore, the flagrant disregard of the philosophy and culture of *ubuntu* that runs through the veins of all Africans is being demonstrated in the butchering of fellow Africans, with some degree of impunity.

It is almost evident that the fanning of hate speech and reckless use of demeaning language can easily be treated as license to cold blood killing. This behaviour can in turn lead to genocidal acts, with their accompanying permanent wounds and psychological scars for generations to come at a time when we are all yearning for south to south cooperation and integration, which is required to move the region and the continent to higher levels of positive socio-economic transformation.

Needless to say, these un-African actions fly in the face of the well-known richness of diversity and the advantages of the cross-fertilization of ideas that arise from the melting pots of cosmopolitan populations. Indeed, we must always remain cognizant of the undisputed fact the whole will always be greater than the sum of its parts.

All this notwithstanding, we believe that South Africa, a remarkable rainbow nation, which was born out of different kinds of support from the continent, and which appears to have a most progressive constitution, ought to be matched by actions on the ground that demonstrate responsible leadership at all levels. It is without doubt that if the perpetrators and inciters are not conscientized on the urgent need to preserve *ubuntu* and brought to book accordingly, the barbaric acts will prevail unabated. Resultantly, the ugly head of xenophobia/ *Afrophobia*, which certainly has no place in international law can have far reaching consequences, and adverse effects on regional integration, creation of wealth and economic growth.

We are gravely concerned that this xenophobia/ *Afrophobia*, which largely ignores African history and presents itself as a clear demonstration of ingratitude severely undermines:

- the African culture of *ubuntuism*
- academic and research collaboration among institutions of higher learning
- regional economic cooperation and integration
- African unity/solidarity

- Regional socio-economic development

It is against this background that we abhor and condemn the unnecessary harassment and grisly loss of human life in the strongest possible terms. We therefore demand that we treat one another as brothers and sisters on the African continent, and have respect for our own precious blood for the sake of both current and future generations.

Today, as we bury our heads in shame we call upon the South African Authorities to be vigilant and step up efforts to end the sporadic acts of African-upon African violence and bring the perpetrators to book. We urge them to hold accountable African leaders who encourage such barbaric acts for whatever reason including pursuits of feudal ethnic purity. We salute all South African citizens who have moved in to protect fellow Africans from rampaging machete-wielding xenophobes. We equally condemn those who have celebrated and watched these grisly murders as a form of entertainment. The tree of African independence and prosperity has always been watered by the blood of martyrs, not that of the victims of xenophobia. We should all be starkly reminded that everybody is a foreigner somewhere but we have an obligation to make Africa a better place for the good of even those yet to come.