



MINISTRY  
HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X893 PRETORIA, 0001, South Africa. 123 Francis Baard Street, Tel: +27 12 312 5555. Fax: +27 12 323 5618, +27 12 324 7879  
Private Bag X9192, CAPE TOWN, 8000, South Africa. 120 Plein Street. Tel: +27 21 465 5513. Fax: +27 21 465 2943, +27 21 465 7956

**An Open Letter to all South African University Vice-Chancellors from Dr BE Nzimande, MP, Minister of Higher Education and Training**

Dear Vice Chancellor

On Friday, 17 April, I met with the University Council Chairs Forum. Among the issues that we discussed was the current appalling violence against our brothers and sisters from other African and Asian countries.

Such behavior is totally unacceptable to the South African government which has taken various measures to combat it. These include tougher policing; providing care, including alternative accommodation, for those who have been displaced by the violence; visits by the President and senior government leaders to affected communities and appeals for South Africans to refrain from such activities. I have added my voice strongly to these appeals.

In addition the violence has been condemned by the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance. Its structures throughout the country have heeded the call of convening community meetings in all wards to quell the xenophobic violence that has been threatening to spread, particularly in KZN and Gauteng. All other political parties have also condemned the violence. Many South Africans have stood up and protected foreign nationals within their communities.

Those engaged in violent activities against poor migrants are a malicious and largely ignorant minority and in no way represent the South African people. However, this does not mean that the violence is spontaneous in all cases and we cannot rule out the possibility that certain people are fanning the flames. For example, there are reports that in some areas, perpetrators of the violence have been bussed from elsewhere to attack foreign nationals. But, whoever is responsible for the violent attacks, they affect everyone.

The current acts of violence against foreign nationals, including the looting of property, do not represent who we are as South Africans. We must not allow a renegade element in our society to tarnish our image as a people. No amount of dissatisfaction can justify these dastardly acts. Government is calling upon business, labour and civil society to actively play a role and educate people about the need for peaceful co-existence. We are a constitutional democracy governed by laws that promote, amongst others, human dignity, inclusiveness and peaceful co-existence in our country, the continent and the world.

Universities help to shape our future leaders and are centres of our intellectual life. They have a particularly important role to play in the present crisis. They must prepare our youth to live and interact peacefully and successfully with others in our continent and our region, to ensure peace and stability and a better living standard for all. This cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of mistrust.

As you may know, there are over 70 000 foreign students at South African universities. It is essential that these students feel safe and welcome in their institutions. To the best of my knowledge, colleges and universities have not been sites of any xenophobic incidents and this attests to the maturity of university leaders, staff and students. It is not clear however, how foreign students have been affected off campus. We must safeguard against any form of xenophobia and I urge universities to take all necessary measures to ensure that it does not occur. These should include both immediate actions to safeguard students where necessary and longer term, more fundamental, processes aimed at ensuring that institutional cultures are as hospitable and nurturing of students from outside our country as they are of South African students.

The actions and programmes undertaken at each university will not be the same, but will need to be tailored to the needs and conditions of individual institutions. I suggest that Vice Chancellors involve all stakeholders in discussions around these matters so that the struggle against xenophobia is shared at all levels of the university. Some universities have already taken steps along these lines; this is commendable and should be emulated by all institutions. It is essential that any programmes initiated at this time are sustained and institutional cultures create a safe space for all students – foreign and local, women and men, black and white, abled and disabled.

A disturbing fact that has become apparent around the current violence is the poor state of our knowledge on its causes and the policy options that we have for dealing with it, especially in the longer term. This requires rigorous research that only our universities are capable of conducting and I urge them to do so. Such research must involve primarily our social scientists: sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, anthropologists, criminologists, built environment specialists and others. The knowledge thus generated will undoubtedly help South Africa to understand itself, its

neighbours and other peoples better and give us a greater chance of building a better country, a better region and a better world.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B.E. Nzimande', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Dr B.E. Nzimande, MP**

**Minister of Higher Education and Training**

***20 April 2015***