

# Xenophobic Attacks Affecting Nationals of other African Countries in South Africa

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Tomorrow (11 September) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to hold a session on xenophobic attacks affecting nationals of other African countries in South Africa. It is expected that the Ambassador of South Africa will address the PCS.

This session was initiated following the recent resurgence of attacks in South Africa against foreign nationals, particularly those coming from other African countries. According to reports, since the beginning of September, xenophobic attacks targeting businesses suspected of being owned by foreign nationals have been looted and vandalized in parts of Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. During the round of attacks that took place on 8 September, attackers moving in organized groups chanting 'foreigners must go' attacked a mosque and looted and burnt shops. Apart from the insecurity and disruption of the livelihood of non-nationals, the various rounds of attacks have thus far resulted in the death of 12 people. According to the government of South Africa, 10 out of the 12 people who lost their lives were South Africans.

The attacks in particular affected nationals from Nigeria, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Zambia, among others. This has led to diplomatic tensions between South Africa and African countries whose nationals have been affected. On 2 September Nigeria summoned South Africa's envoy in Nigeria to express its protest of the attacks targeting Nigerians in South Africa. After meeting South African Ambassador in Addis Ababa at the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ethiopia's state minister for foreign affairs, condemning the recent attacks, urged South Africa to enhance protection for Ethiopians.

Zambian President Edgar Lungu reportedly went further urging the South African Development Community and the AU to intervene 'before this xenophobia degenerates into full-scale genocide'. He also expressed fear that 'this carnage has potential to destabilise African unity'.

This is not the first time that such attacks have been perpetrated against foreigners, particularly those from other African countries. Dozens of people were killed in anti-foreigner attacks in 2008 and 2015.

When attacks took place in 2015, the PSC held a session on the issue at its 503rd meeting on 30 April 2015. In the press statement it issued after the session, the PSC not only condemned the attacks but also 'underlined the need for a comprehensive approach to these challenges, taking into account the constraints of Member States, the imperative to respect the rights of migrants and ensure their humane treatment, as well as the overall objective of achieving freedom of movement across the continent, as one of the main components of the integration agenda of the Union.'

Faki Mahamat, issued a statement. Condemning what he called 'the incidents of violence against nationals of fellow African countries in South Africa, including the looting and destruction of their property,' the Chairperson also called for 'further immediate steps to protect the lives of people and their property, ensure that all perpetrators are brought to account for their acts, and that justice be done to those who suffered economic and other losses.' On its part the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights also After the resurgence of the attacks since the start of the month, AU Commission Chairperson, Moussa issued a statement strongly condemning the resurgence of these xenophobic violent attacks

as acts that not only constitute possible violations of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Charter) but are also contrary to the principles and ideals of African solidarity cherished in the African Charter.

While the reactions from some corners of South Africa was seen as extending support to the attacks, various officials of the Government of South Africa expressed their rejection of the attacks. President Cyril Ramaphosa in his response stated that "attacks on foreign nationals is something totally unacceptable, something that we cannot allow to happen in South Africa". It was also reported that police arrested over 200 people for participating in the xenophobic attacks.

There are a number of concerns that some members in the PSC raise. The first relate to the threat that the incidents of attacks represent including in undermining peaceful coexistence. There are also concerns about the recurrence of the attacks and the risk of the attacks continuing, hence the need for interventions that properly address the conditions and drivers of the xenophobic attacks, affecting in particular nationals from other African countries. Concerns about the adequacy of the response of law enforcement agencies are also expressed.

There are PSC members who expect to know what South Africa plans to do differently to deal with the current resurgence of xenophobic attacks from previous incidents to avoid its recurrence, including carrying out investigations into what happened and the causes and drivers of the attacks. Of particular interest is the need for putting in place measure to deal with anti-foreign sentiments, directed particularly against nationals from other African Countries including and how South Africa can collaborate with other countries, among others, to use the values of African solidarity and Ubuntu for promoting peaceful coexistence.

Beyond condemnation of the attacks and expressing solidarity

with victims, for the PSC and AU member states the need for promoting African solidarity including the promotion of free movement of people remains a key issue. Accordingly, building on its call from its 503rd session for pursuing the overall objective of achieving freedom of movement across the continent, as one of the main components of the integration agenda of the Union, this presents an opportunity for highlighting the imperative of ratifying the 2016 AU protocol on free movement of peoples.

The expected outcome of the session is a press statement. The statement is expected to welcome the statement of the AUC Chair and the measures being taken by the South African government to manage the situation. In terms of immediate actions, it may call on South Africa to initiate investigation to identify the cause and drivers of the violence with a view to put in place measures that prevent its recurrence. It may also reiterate its earlier call for a special session devoted to the issue of migration and its related challenges, with a view to agreeing to an enhanced African collective effort, on the basis of a report to be submitted by the Commission.