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## Plan for refugee camps sparks backlash

Local and provincial authorities face a growing backlash over the refugee camps, which have been branded places of suffering designed to spawn suffering and disease.

A list of high-profile speakers, which included Constitutional Court Chief Justice Pius Langa, Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba and the Treatment Action Campaign's Zackie Achmat, slammed the camps on Tuesday and appealed for foreign nationals to be returned urgently to their communities.

They were among speakers from civil society groups across the spectrum at a rally which packed St George's Cathedral on Tuesday, with hundreds of people wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the word "Foreigner" in solidarity with those who have been driven from their homes here.

Everyone sat shocked and saddened as refugee Victoire Ngoy, from the DRC, asked whether the destruction of people's lives with guns, machetes and batons could be called xenophobia - or whether it was actually war.

**'We are not willing to stay in South Africa'** He is living outside Caledon Square police station and appealed to the meeting "to back us to get out of this country".

"We are not willing to stay in South Africa. When small groups of people with no weapons are being destroyed there is no such thing as human rights.

"We call it genocide," Ngoy said.

The handling of the refugee crisis by South African authorities came in for a serious tongue-lashing at the rally, with Achmat telling the emotional crowd that the country had an "immoral" political leadership in charge.

He suggested a Marshall Plan was needed to address inequality and poverty as a matter of urgency because the violence had its roots in "inequality, joblessness, gutter education and hunger".

Medecins Sans Frontieres' Dr Eric Goemaere said a major humanitarian crisis had to be declared because non-government and community-based organisations were being forced to address the chaos with no resources from the state, "with nothing".

"It is a scandal," he said.

Chief Justice Langa said the constitution, which protected every person within the borders of the country, was failing the foreign nationals.

Achmat said the camps should be closed and people should be allowed to take shelter near their homes, jobs and schools, or reintegration would only prove more difficult.

Freddy Nkosi, of the Sonke Gender Justice Refugee Programme, said families were being split between camps, and that even if they were in the same camp husbands, wives and children were sleeping in separate tents. "I have seen people 50km and more from their schools, universities and workplaces. Many people have lost their jobs.

"If the South African government had been responsible and taken serious precautions, this situation could have been prevented," he said.

A march against xenophobia was planned for Khayelitsha on Wednesday and the Aids Law Project said foreign nationals had been invited to lead a march of protestors through the streets of Cape Town on Monday.

The condemnation comes as volunteers and resources at the Soetwater refugee camp are stretched to the limit and there has been a desperate call for help and the communication of a set plan from the government.

"There is no clear, set plan. There are people employed to do this on a full-time basis within the government, but we are not seeing that," a volunteer in charge of co-ordination at Soetwater said on Tuesday.

Wilfred Solomons-Johannes of the city's disaster management said, however, that about 500 city officials were on the ground each day co-ordinating volunteers and providing humanitarian aid.