



SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE NEGLIGENCE IN XENOPHOBIC ATTACK

On 4 January 2009 an armed crowd shouting abuse against foreign nationals raided a building inhabited by refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in Durban city centre, KwaZulu-Natal province. Two people were killed and others injured. Despite the fact that the nearest police station, Broad Street, was only moments away, the police did not intervene until the attackers had left. A year later there is no evidence that the police have been called to account for their failure to protect life.

Victor Zowa from Zimbabwe, and Omar Said from Tanzania, died after being forced out of a sixth-floor window. A third man, also from Zimbabwe, sustained spinal injuries. Residents of the building, known as Venture Africa, hid in bathrooms and under beds to escape the attackers.

Eyewitnesses report that the armed crowd had marched past the

police station, chanting and carrying weapons in full view. The police did not stop or question them. Employees at Venture Africa stated publicly that they called the police during the attack asking for help. Still, the police did not come.

The attack was reportedly part of a community crime-fighting initiative led by the local municipal ward councillor. Following a public outcry, four men, including the ward councillor, were brought to trial on charges of public violence. One was also charged with attempted murder.

Civil society organizations in Durban have called for the Broad Street police to be held to account for their failure to intervene and have complained of a pattern of discrimination towards foreign nationals.

The attack occurred less than eight months after a wave of xenophobic violence in May 2008 in



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which more than 60 people were killed and tens of thousands of refugees and migrants were forced from their homes. However, a police spokesperson was quick to announce that this incident was not motivated by xenophobia.

Amnesty International is concerned at the apparent lack of any thorough, independent and public investigation into the conduct of the police during this attack, despite early promises of an official investigation.

Many refugees and migrants living in Venture Africa, had sought shelter there after fleeing previous xenophobic attacks.

ACT NOW

Please sign and send the attached postcard to the KwaZulu-Natal police commissioner, expressing concern about the conduct of Broad Street police and the apparent lack of any investigation.