

Orange Farm Simmers Down after looting of foreign-owned businesses

The City has condemned youth activities which led to the intimidation and looting of businesses owned by foreign nationals at Orange Farm, south of the city last Friday and recommitted to intensify the re-integration of the two communities to defuse future tensions.

A statement issued on behalf of the Member of the Mayoral Committee on Health and Social Development, Councilor Nonceba Molwele, said: "The City of Johannesburg condemns and disassociates with activities which lead communities to take law into their hands on whatever issue which brought unhappiness in their area. We are a democratic country with reasonable laws. These laws always encourage us to find ways to deal with any difficult situation".

Law enforcement agency's intervention assisted in calming the situation. City ward councillors and officials will continue to engage the community and find ways less confrontational to promote understanding and tolerance in the area.

"We are happy that calm has returned and looting stopped. There are no new reports of lawlessness since Saturday. The City commends good leadership shown by the community to work with law enforcement agencies, elected political leaders and officials to end the tension," added Clr Molwele's statement.

Clr Molwele explained that Johannesburg has a long history of "peaceful co-existence" between South Africans and migrants. "Ours has been, and will continue to be an inclusive city. We need to intensify our programme of engaging the community and encourage them to find different ways of working with foreign nationals. If the community finds unhappiness in the way the foreign nationals operate business, we need to be alerted and so that together with law enforcement agencies, necessary legal steps could be taken to correct the situation. Communities who conduct unlawful activities must know that they are opening themselves to action by law-enforcement agencies."

In the past, independent research has shown that migrants are often the victims of crime and harassment. Research has also found that international migrants are likely to contribute in exchanging skills with locals, create jobs and help to build an inclusive prosperous city.

The City has cautioned against some media suggestions that looting was motivated by xenophobia. "Our initial analysis with Orange Farm residents disagrees with this perception. Communities largely blamed youth which acted in a 'not so cool' delinquent way. More hard work must be done to root out ignorance and all other forms of discrimination against fellow residents at Orange Farm and in general, citywide."

Johannesburg has recognised the positive part played by migrants in its economic wellbeing. In on-going basis, the city has tackled concerns associated with migration by establishing a body that looks at promoting integration of migrants across the city.

This body, the Johannesburg Migration Advisory Committee (Jmac), was launched in 2009 to find ways and means to ensure that migrants become part of, and contribute positively to the development of the city.

In December 2004, the city approved and adopted the Human Development Strategy, a move meant to build social cohesion among the migrant community. In addition to this, the City developed a City-Support Strategy for migrants. This strategy sought to address poverty and inequality among communities, and promote social inclusion.

In April 2007, Joburg established a Migrants' Helpdesk to deal with issues affecting foreign nationals. The desk helps migrants to access government services, co-ordinates the City's migrant support initiatives and, together with foreign nationals, identify and address key concerns and challenges.

After the xenophobic attacks in 2005, Joburg adopted a Counter-Xenophobia and Common Citizenship Programme. This forms part of its long-term strategic interventions to deal with the social attitudes to xenophobia and the effects of human trafficking, as well as to increase tolerance of migrants. This approach has been also drawn positive comments from human rights groups.

The City has subsequently being invited and attended international forums, presenting its migration policy. At another level, the United Nations Development Programme agreed to work with the city in replicating Joburg experiences to other cities in the country. Matatiele municipality in the Eastern Cape, is among the first to establish its own migration office. There are however other cities planning to launch Migration Desks.

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