



JESUIT
INSTITUTE
SOUTH
AFRICA

“LEADERS: TAKE RESPONSIBILITY!”

“What have you done? Your neighbour’s blood cries out to me from the ground!” (Genesis 4:10)

The Jesuit Institute South Africa strongly condemns the deplorable violence, thuggery and looting which has taken place in Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Pretoria. Violence, robbery and lawlessness can never be condoned and are never acceptable ways of acting. The Prophet Isaiah tell us clearly: “For I, the Lord of justice, hate robbery and wrong” (Isaiah 61:8).

The ongoing chaos has violated basic human rights and makes a mockery of the law enshrined in our Constitution.

The Jesuit Institute urgently appeals to our law enforcement agencies, often working in difficult and dangerous situations, to work tirelessly to maintain law and order. Furthermore, those who are responsible for these criminal acts must be held responsible. Now is the time for action!

The Jesuit Institute is also concerned that some leaders have contributed to this sad state of affairs by their irresponsible, populist remarks for political expediency. Words have power and the ability to influence. Xenophobic rhetoric leads to xenophobic behaviour. This must stop!

The Archbishop of Johannesburg, Buti Tlhagale, warns that “attacks on migrants cannot just be reduced to hooliganism. These attacks are patently fuelled by anti-foreigner sentiment.” He continues: “When local communities go on a service delivery protest, they take out their anger on foreign nationals. They harass them, attack them, destroy and loot their shops.”¹

We must admit that beneath much of the frustration and anger is a despair at the lack of service delivery, economic empowerment and security of our own people. We must hold politicians accountable for this.

Statements by leaders condemning the violence we have witnessed are not good enough anymore. Leaders who have made irresponsible remarks must publicly apologise to everyone living in South Africa. To those leaders we say: Have the courage to take responsibility for your own careless words and hold yourselves accountable! We share Pope Francis’ observation that “Political addresses that tend to blame every evil on migrants and to deprive the poor of hope are unacceptable.”² You have been entrusted to lead, much has been given to you, and much more is now expected from you (Luke 12:48).

To all people of goodwill, we urge you to seek ways to reach out to all those in need in our country. We must remain close to the broken-hearted and those whose spirits have been crushed (Ps 34:18). We must demand accountability from our leaders.

ENDS

For more information:

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¹ Archbishop Buti Tlhagale “*Welcoming migrants and refugees (SECAM’S 50th Anniversary address)*”. <http://sacbc.org.za/6879/>

² Pope Francis “*Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the celebration of the 52nd World Day of Peace – 1st January 2019*” http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20181208_messaggio-52giornatamondiale-pace2019.html 6)