Response to recent violent attacks against ‘foreigners’!

A few weeks ago the District Six Museum and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum opened its Heritage Ambassadors’ exhibition, jointly constructed by young people from the two museums. The objective of the exhibition is to foster communication and understanding of the deep histories of division, migration and forced removals amongst our youth as a process of building a post-apartheid South Africa.

The events of the past two weeks have undermined our efforts at building community. In communicating the traumatic experiences of the apartheid past, especially the difficult histories of forced removals and the migrant labour system, our museums are painfully aware of how apartheid sought to sow divisions and hatred amongst our people. We have committed to communicating this message to the youth and the public at large. This task is more urgent now than ever before!

Adjacent to the District Six Museum, outside Caledon Square Police Station, large numbers of destitute and displaced residents have sought some protection and a refuge from the violence engulfing Cape Town’s townships. An employee of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum was forced to find refuge in Stellenbosch. One casual employee of the museum, who made a substantial contribution to its exhibition, Stories from Home / Iimbali ZeKhaya, was attacked by some residents in front of his house.

These experiences are not random. They bear testimony to the very conditions of apartheid against which our museums continue to struggle. We see a danger of repetition and wish to declare our determination to work towards peace and tolerance in our communities. Community museums such as ours will continue to strive to build critical spaces for dialogue in the interests of defining post-apartheid communities.

To this end we unreservedly condemn the spate of indiscriminate violence against members of our communities. We owe it to our constituencies and their memories of apartheid to oppose all forms of displacement of communities and people through violent means. In the words of the anti-colonial liberation movements in Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa we say A Luta Continua!

Prof Crain Soudien, Chair: Board of Trustees, District Six Museum
Prof Leslie Witz, Chair: Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum Board

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