

JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH LEADERS IN THE EDEN DISTRICT

On Recent Nativist hostilities and Ethno-nationalistic Tensions in the Eden District

Issued following the gathering of Christian leaders at the Cathedral of St. Mark the Evangelist, George

We, the undersigned Christian leaders serving in Mossel Bay, George, Knysna, Plettenberg Bay, Oudtshoorn and the surrounding communities of the Eden District, have met to reflect prayerfully and honestly on the recent incidents of nativist hostility or ethno-nationalism in our region and the growing fear and uncertainty affecting both local residents and foreign nationals.

We issue this statement as pastors and servants of our communities. We do not speak as politicians. We do not seek political advantage. We speak because people entrusted to our care are anxious, divided, angry, grieving, and uncertain about what lies ahead.

Recent events in Mossel Bay have led to violence and the loss of life. Families have lost loved ones. Communities have experienced fear and instability. We mourn with those who grieve and pray for healing for all who have been affected. No family should have to bury a loved one because anger has turned into violence.

At the same time, we recognise that these events did not occur in a vacuum.

South Africans are carrying deep frustrations. Poverty continues to increase. Unemployment remains painfully high, especially among young people. Many households struggle daily to secure food, housing, healthcare, and basic services. Corruption and the misuse of public resources have weakened public trust. State institutions have too often failed to deliver effectively, consistently, and fairly. Immigration systems have not functioned as efficiently as they should. Border management remains a source of concern. Communities frequently feel unheard and neglected by those entrusted with public leadership.

These realities are genuine and cannot simply be dismissed.

However, we reject the notion that foreign nationals are responsible for the structural failures of our country. Foreign shopkeepers did not create

unemployment. Refugees did not capture state institutions. Migrant workers did not engineer corruption or the collapse of public trust. The failures of governance, administration and accountability cannot be corrected by threatening, intimidating, or attacking vulnerable people living among us.

We are deeply concerned by attempts, from various quarters, to redirect legitimate public frustration towards undocumented foreign nationals rather than addressing the underlying causes of hardship. Simplistic explanations may provide convenient political slogans, but they do not provide solutions.

We also recognise that parts of the business community have, at times, contributed to tensions by employing foreign nationals at wages and under conditions that fall below legal and ethical standards. While many businesses operate responsibly and lawfully, there are instances where vulnerable workers, whether local or foreign, are exploited because they are perceived as less likely to challenge unfair treatment or report labour violations. Such practices undermine labour protections, create resentment among unemployed and underemployed South Africans, distort fair competition, and ultimately place workers and communities in conflict with one another rather than addressing the conduct of those who profit from these arrangements.

As Christian leaders, we affirm several principles.

First, every person bears God-given dignity and worth. Regardless of nationality, language, ethnicity, legal status or economic standing, human beings are not disposable. We cannot claim to worship God while treating others as though their lives matter less than our own.

Second, we recognise both the pain of local communities and the fear experienced by foreign nationals. Compassion is not a limited resource. It is possible to care about unemployed South Africans while also rejecting violence against migrants and refugees. Listening to one group does not require silencing another.

Third, we affirm the importance of the rule of law. Questions relating to immigration, documentation and border management are matters that must be addressed through lawful processes and competent institutions. Vigilantism, collective punishment, and mob justice have no place in a constitutional democracy.

Fourth, we call for accountability from those entrusted with public office. Leadership requires honesty, competence, and courage. Communities deserve transparent communication, effective service delivery, and institutions capable of fulfilling their mandates. Government at local, provincial, and national levels must accept responsibility where failures have contributed to the collapse of trust.

In practical terms, we call for the following actions:

1. **An immediate commitment to non-violence.** We urge all residents to reject intimidation, threats and attacks against foreign nationals and any other members of our communities.
2. **Responsible leadership and communication.** Political leaders, community representatives, and public figures must refrain from inflammatory rhetoric that fuels division and fear. Words matter. Leaders should unite communities rather than exploit their frustrations.
3. **A coordinated response by government departments.** We invite the Departments of Home Affairs, Health, Social Development, Education, and local municipalities, together with the South African Police Service and immigration authorities, to engage directly with faith leaders and communities. People require accurate information, visible leadership, and practical support.
4. **Support for affected communities.** Churches and faith communities should identify those who are vulnerable, provide pastoral care, facilitate dialogue, and create spaces where grievances can be expressed safely and constructively.
5. **Long-term investment in social cohesion.** We encourage initiatives that bring local residents and migrants together, particularly through youth programmes, community projects, business partnerships, and educational opportunities that address prejudice and misinformation.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we remember that love of neighbour is not limited by nationality. The call to love one another is neither sentimental nor naïve. It is a disciplined commitment to recognise the humanity of those with whom we disagree, to resist fear and hatred, and to pursue justice without abandoning compassion.

We therefore appeal to our congregations and to all people of goodwill:

Do not surrender to despair.

Do not allow grief and frustration to become hatred.

Do not permit politicians, activists or social media voices to convince you that violence will solve problems that require wisdom, accountability, and sustained effort.

Ask difficult questions of those in authority. Demand integrity from those who govern. Hold political parties and public institutions accountable for their promises, decisions, and performance. Participate actively and responsibly in democratic processes. Refuse to normalise corruption, incompetence, and division, regardless of who is responsible.

At the same time, remain committed to the difficult work of building communities in which people can disagree without destroying one another.

Our country has overcome profound challenges before. We believe that South Africans are capable of choosing responsibility over scapegoating, truth over slogans, and neighbourliness over suspicion.

May we have the courage to confront injustice honestly, the humility to listen carefully, and the determination to work together for communities marked by safety, dignity, and hope.

Issued on behalf of the Christian leaders gathered in the Eden District.

SIGNATORIES

Name: _____

Church / Denomination / Organisation:

Position:

Signature:

Date:

Contact Details:

"Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:18)