

1000s of foreigners flee murderous mobs

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Polokwane - Thousands of Zimbabweans living in a township outside Polokwane, Limpopo, fled last week following the most serious wave of xenophobic violence to hit South Africa in recent months.

The purge included the killing of Zimbabwean Godfrey Sibanda, who was cornered by a mob and stoned to death on Monday night in Extension 75 of Seshoga township, northwest of Polokwane, while walking home from work.

Six RDP houses in Extension 71 which had been rented to Zimbabweans were also torched by large mobs. More than 3 000 other Zimbabweans fled to hide in nearby bushes.

Sibanda was accused of raping a five-year-old girl and for being behind other criminal acts in the area, which included the murder of a couple last week and robbing a security guard.

The police said they had heard of the incidents, but had no record of these alleged crimes being reported to them.

The day after Sibanda was killed, more Zimbabweans were attacked and evicted from their homes by locals who dumped their blankets, bags and other belongings on the street.

3 000 displaced

Those who escaped unharmed were being sheltered at the Seshego police station with their families. They said that more than 3 000 of their fellow countrymen were displaced.

They were scared to go to the police because they thought the police were working with the community, said Christopher Manyanhaire, 27.

He was evicted from his home with his sister, three-year-old nephew and brother-in-law.

He said that the mob caught his sister, Locadia, after she tried to escape through the window.

"They were at the door trying to kick it down but I was holding it while my sister tried to escape, but they caught her and beat her until the police arrived," he said.

Manyanhaire, whose family was among those at Seshego police station, said locals had complained about Zimbabweans getting state houses cheaply from owners who rented them out.

"They have no right to be living in an RDP house because it's for us South Africans," said Paulina Makokwane, a South African whose house is surrounded by three Zimbabwean-occupied houses that were torched on Tuesday.

## House-to-house search

On Tuesday evening, City Press witnessed a group of close to 200 people going from house-to-house looking for Zimbabweans.

Provincial police spokesperson Brigadier Hangwani Mulaudzi said one person was arrested for arson and they were still investigating the murder case.

Fungai Chingorivo, who was part of the evicted group at the police station, said she and her husband had lost everything they had worked for since coming to South Africa in 2008.

“We don’t know what to do now. We have no money and going back home to Zimbabwe empty-handed is pointless because our children and families are suffering,” she said.

By Thursday morning, there were 20 displaced families at the police station with some of their belongings which they had managed to save.

More were expected to arrive and the police have called in local disaster-management officials to help with shelter.

ANC Limpopo spokesperson David Masondo said the party was “disappointed” at what had happened and that it was symptomatic of economic stress in both Limpopo and Zimbabwe.