

Business, tourism leaders call for decisive action on attacks

Both Moeketsi Mosola, CEO of South African Tourism, and Jerry Vilakazi, CEO of Business Unity South Africa (BUSA), yesterday, Tuesday, 20 May 2008, added their support to the calls by the President, senior government officials and other leaders for an immediate stop to attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa.

“These attacks are happening in isolated areas of South Africa, and they place a very negative reputation on brand South Africa and go against the efforts implemented by SA Tourism and IMC over the past five years in order to market our country as a must-visit holiday, trade and investment destination,” stated Mosola.

“We condemn in the strongest possible sense any attacks on citizens from other countries on the African continent and beyond. In the spirit of hosting Africa's first FIFA World Cup, it is of critical importance that we recognise that we are not an island, that we are bound together as Africans by history, culture, our warm and welcoming nature and our ability to embrace people of all backgrounds. Many foreigners who live here respect the law of the land and have over the years helped to build the wealth of South Africa. They also contribute to the skills base, reconstruction and development of our country and continue to do so.”

Said Vilakazi, “As BUSA we condemn in the strongest possible terms these irrational attacks on foreign nationals. The physical attacks on foreign nationals and their business, coupled with the theft of property on foreign nationals cannot be justified under any circumstances. It is our considered view that these attacks should be treated as criminal offences, and the perpetrators treated as such.”

Double efforts

BUSA furthermore called on the different elements of the law enforcement agencies to double their efforts to ensure that calm is restored, and that the perpetrators are arrested. It urged in particular that the intelligence arm of the police to proactively gather “intelligence data” to ensure that further attacks were prevented and that the prosecutorial arm of the criminal justice system should ensure that justice does take place with immediacy and with fairness.

BUSA also welcomed the swift action taken by Government to establish a Panel to investigate the root causes of the violence. Said Vilakazi, “BUSA believes that there may have been elements in our community who might have taken advantage of the genuine hardships faced by the South African people. However, no amount of economic hardship and discontent can ever justify criminal activity and bigotry that have characterised these attacks. While cognisant of the challenges regarding unfulfilled service delivery expectations rising cost of living in some parts of the country, we reject the view that these problems warrant these attacks on foreign nationals.”

Mosola, who also called for all relevant authorities to resolve this matter swiftly, said that SA Tourism wanted to reassure all potential foreign visitors that it is safe to visit South Africa and that the incidents of attacks are contained in very small areas. “Our visitors are still and will be welcome to visit SA in order to experience the breathtaking wide open spaces and experience first-hand the diverse and unique combinations of holiday options available here.”

Vilakazi concluded by saying that BUSA has noted the criticism that has been directed at sections of the business community, who allegedly employ foreign nationals over South Africans as a means of breaking labour legislation. “Such incidents must be reported to the Department of Labour who must ensure compliance with legislation. As BUSA we look forward to working with Department of Labour to ensure compliance with the law by the all employers,” he said.

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