

Abahlali baseMjondolo

Umhlaba Izindlu neSithunzi Land Housing Dignity

Only complete reform of economy can defuse tensions

Only complete reform of economy can defuse tensions

Cape Times May 28, 2008 Edition 1

Drucilla Cornell, Mahmood Mamdani and Sampie Terreblanche

We believe that the violence that South Africa has experienced over the last week is systemic in nature and will not end until the underlying causes of economic distress have been dealt with thoroughly.

South Africa is in a state of emergency because of the failure to address desperate poverty and is in urgent need of a mechanism to begin public discussion on how to ensure dignity for all those who live here.

Even by conservative estimates, over 50% of the South African population experiences dire poverty.

Many of the poor live in townships, and for the most part, what is at stake in these townships is a battle for mere survival in unbearable living conditions. The consequence of this poverty has invariably led to the current outpouring of frustration and rage in various South African townships.

When survival itself is at stake, it is not surprising to see violence against those who can only seem to be a threat to whatever little means of a livelihood there is. There is only one solution, which is to address the underlying economic distress – to address the complete failure of supply-side capitalist economics in South Africa.

To begin, therefore, we call for a Justice and Reconciliation Commission, which cannot be more timely and more necessary – in light of the dashed hopes of those who thought that the new dispensation would provide them with a better life.

We read in the paper that the conflicts in the townships betray the leaders of the struggle in South Africa.

But is it not the other way around; that people feel betrayed because they continue to live in apartheid-like conditions?

In 1997, Professor Mahmood Mamdani and Professor Sampie Terreblanche called for a Justice and Reconciliation Commission, which would focus on the systematic exploitation endured by the majority black population for over 350 years of racial capitalism.

The aim of such a commission is to focus on the systematic character of racial capitalism, which began long before the institutionalisation of apartheid.

The work of such a commission would be both to educate whites, who were the beneficiaries of this exploitative system, as well as to develop a programme of reparations, restitution and, perhaps most important, the establishment of economic measures that could effectively grapple with the devastating institutional effects of an internal system of colonisation.

We are calling for a two-year commission to take up this work. The commission would also explore alternatives to the current Anglo-Americanisation of the South African economy, which has effectively blocked any substantive development of the country.

This commission would focus primarily on the consideration of comprehensive programmes for poverty alleviation. This is not to be confused with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which focused on perpetrators and reparations for individual victims.

Community organisations that have worked tirelessly to develop programmes for restitution and reparation should be seriously considered as part of the democratic discussion of economic reform.

Consultation with economists who are exploring alternatives to capitalism will be vital.

The outcome of the commission would be a comprehensive programme of economic reforms in all basic areas of life: education, housing, health care and land reform.

This report would consider responses to the aggressive Washington Consensus, which pushes a particular programme of supply-side economics that constrains the re-distribution programmes that must be undertaken in the name of restorative justice.

As long as this extreme injustice continues to exist, we are naïve to have any expectation of peace.

** Professor Cornell is South Africa's National Research Foundation chair, based at the University of Cape Town as Professor of Customary Law, Indigenous Values and the Dignity Jurisprudence. She is also Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University, New Jersey. Professor Mamdani is the Herbert Lehman Professor of Government*

and the director of the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University. He was Professor of African Studies at UCT during the 1990s. Professor Terreblanche is emeritus Professor of Economics at the University of Stellenbosch.

This entry was posted in Drucilla Cornell, Mahmood Mamdani, Sampie Terreblanche on May 28, 2008 [<http://abahlali.org/node/3606/>] by Abahlali_3.