

'Wrong to focus on whites'

How do black people feel when whites get killed simply because they are white? SOBANTU XAYIYA talked to residents of greater Cape Town and found that, although nobody approves of these attacks, some feel they are an inevitable part of the price South Africans are paying for decades of injustice.

Mongezi Masiza, 24, a final-year engineering student at Leaf College in Rondebosch, said it was wrong to place an emphasis on whites in the current climate of violence. "The question should rather be the killing of South Africans in general, because it is not only whites who are killed, but everybody," he said.

"It is when we have a new non-racial government that these things can be adequately addressed. The reason whites are targeted is because they are seen as the people who are resisting political changes. This is evidenced by the rate at which they are leaving the country."

But you are talking about long-term solutions. What about the interim – between now and that democratic non-racial dispensation? Should we fold our arms and let them be slaughtered?

"You seem to forget that we are in a war, and this war is no different from others – it is

governed by its exigencies. I'm not sanctioning the slaughtering of whites, but I'm saying that this question cannot be addressed in isolation from the national question. In the immediate future whites should stay in their places; if they come to the townships they should do so as groups, not as individuals."

What about doctors and other white community workers – do they fall under the so-called exigencies of war classification?

"Those whose work is prominent and beneficial to the community shouldn't be victimised," said Masiza. He described incidents like the killing of American student Amy Biehl and other racial attacks in Guguletu and Khayelitsha as "isolated cases which we cannot help, spontaneous reactions of frustration which should be discouraged".

Nceba Fikizolo, 25, who works as a bank teller in Claremont, said a distinction should be drawn between whites whose presence in the townships is "genuine" and those who

do not further the interests of the community. He singled out white police officers in this regard.

"Most of them joined the force when apartheid was brutally enforced. Now they cannot be expected to be agents of transformation and peace custodians. They were trained to perpetuate and preserve the apartheid laws."

He said Amy Biehl should not have been killed and it was unfortunate that she was associated with the apartheid state. He also felt that the government's selective attitude to the victims of violence was fuelling racial tensions.

"There has been so much outcry over the St James church massacre, but little government reaction to the Thokoza, Katlehong and Tembisa killings. The youth is angry over this lack of response on the part of the government. Most of the youth are not exposed to sophisticated definitions of the enemy. As a result they see any white person as the

Will to mend dented

The demand that white members of the Internal Stability Unit (ISU) operating in the townships should be replaced by black police officers from these communities, is growing in strength. Nyanga police station commander Henry Hubbard says that would be the long-term solution to better police-community relations.

What in your opinion has caused this outcry against white police officers?

"What I've noticed in the last couple of years is that the public generally does not want anything that is connected to the government. For example, if a person is assaulted and we come to his or her rescue, the offi-

cers executing their duty end up being the victims. That is the general approach in most communities.

"As a result the police are sceptical of the community they are required to serve and the community also views them with suspicion – there is no co-operation."



HUBBARD: the gap can be bridged.



Monde Sam, 32, an ANC Youth League member who works at the Eyona Advice Centre in Guguletu, said he felt the ANC could attempt to offer protection to people performing services beneficial to the community.

Are you suggesting that marshals should be deployed in these areas and be at the service of those affected?

"Even that option has problems of its own - it will definitely lead to a direct confrontation with those people or forces perpetrating such killings. Other means have to

be explored. The question of non-racialism must not be seen as blacks courting whites, but rather from the perspective of the overall objectives of the organisation. If we protect people we won't be informed by skin colour, but on the basis that they are human beings."

Ntomboxolo Zitha, 37, of Khayelitsha felt that more policemen should be deployed in the townships, not only to protect white people but to combat crime in general. She said in the past two years crime had escalated to the extent that it has become difficult for children to attend local schools or run errands.

Zitha felt strongly that the police should "stay out of politics" and "seriously" get on with policing. However, as regards demands for white officers to leave the townships, she felt that this was not a priority in the Western Cape. Compared to other regions, police in the Western Cape had "not done so much damage", she said.

Sobantu Xayiya is a freelance journalist based in Cape Town.

MASIZA: Not only whites who are killed.

GABUZA: Whites associated with the system.

FIKIZOLO: Little reaction when blacks die.

cause of their miseries. So Amy Biehl became a victim of this short-sightedness. It's a crossfire.

"We are also not safe here in the townships. We live under the spectre of death squads. I mean, at any moment they can just burst into this place and open fire on us."

What is your position on ideologies that nurture and encourage these types of racial killings?

"I suppose you are talking about the PAC. Well, as far as my understanding goes, that is irrelevant. To remedy this situation I think we will have to try some of the suggestions that have been made, like that the uneducated youth should be taken to the army."

Martin Tshezi, 22, unemployed, thinks that political affiliations should be put aside in order to address the problem adequately.

"The role that the white police play in this question shouldn't be overlooked. In some cases people kill a white person to see what

the reaction of the police will be. It's more of an outburst of frustration. White policemen are committing atrocities in our townships and it's difficult to get hold of them in their armoured vehicles. As a result, individual whites who are going on their normal business in the townships are caught up in this cycle of frustration.

"Personally I'm against the killing of people by virtue of their skin colour. There are many white people who have sacrificed their privileges for our struggle. However, if there are activities in the townships, whites should come in massive numbers in order to close the gap between the townships and the suburbs. Moreover, that will serve to educate people that we are one."

Madoda Gabuza, 41, unemployed, said the killing of ordinary white people working within black communities should be discouraged. "They are killed because they are associated with the system that caused us to starve, to be homeless and unemployed," he said.

image of police in townships

What is your view on demands that white officers in the ISU should be replaced by black officers?

"The ISU does not only comprise white officers, there are also brown and black officials. My experience is that if a white police officer's attitude is correct, the response is always positive.

"The gap between white and black police officers can be bridged by negotiating with the affected communities. But this doesn't necessarily mean joint control of the police force."

Are you personally opposed to joint policing?

"I feel the community should be repre-

sented within the policing structures."

What do you suggest could be a viable strategy to improve the very poor community-police relationship?

"Community representation will help to restore our dented image. There are meetings currently taking place between us and the community where we are attempting to thrash out our differences. Although I may say the community is very demanding and is not prepared to compromise on certain issues.

"It might interest you to know that within the police force itself we are facing two major problems with regard to black staff. Firstly, there is a shortage of black officers

holding senior positions because most of them are reluctant to hold such positions. Secondly, there are ethnic barriers. The different language and social backgrounds of officers is a problem.

"There are short-term solutions which can be implemented within the force, like introducing language courses for black, brown and white members; teaching them to understand themselves, their community and different cultural backgrounds.

"The long-term solution is to replace white officers with black officers. The peace structures and community leaders should be involved in this. Some problems that are perceived as insurmountable will be overcome once a democratic government is in place."