



"Rainbow Nation", Malcolm Payne



UCT's "*first response*" to the current crisis

Following the spread of xenophobic violence to the Western Cape, and specifically Cape Town, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Njabulo S. Ndebele, on Friday 23 May established a Crisis Response Task Team to coordinate and lead the University of Cape Town's response. Professor Ndebele appointed two Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Professors Martin Hall and Thandabantu Nhlapo to convene the task team and the subsequent necessary meetings and interactions for a comprehensive approach to the crisis. Reporting daily to the Vice-Chancellor, the brief was to ensure that UCT's approach makes a distinct impact now and into the future as part of the existing Respect campaign.

The first open meeting was scheduled for Monday, 26 May from 08h30 to 10h00 at the Beattie Theatre on Upper Campus. However, with the crisis spiraling beyond control leaving many more of Cape Town's foreigners homeless, key units in UCT began work through Friday evening and the weekend.

By Sunday, as the numbers of families displaced grew; UCT's support and service continued. In his message to staff, Professor Ndebele said,

"Diversity is an integral part of UCT's core character - we have more international students than any other African university. We have celebrated this on campus and around the world because we know the value that a diverse campus and society brings. I have no doubt that UCT will showcase - in this moment of national crisis - its deep commitment to our shared values of respect for human life and rights."

This report summarizes UCT's "first response" to the current crisis between Friday, 23 May and Friday, 30 May. The report deals with activities related to departments and groups involved in rendering assistance during the crisis, in various ways.

In essence, UCT's focus was on three areas of support: providing supplies, assisting with support for refugees at holding sites, and providing health support.

At this stage, the Crisis Response Task Team is building a consensus on appropriate ways to assist with longer-term solutions using the analytical, professional and research-based expertise across the range of the University's field of work.

- **Jammie Shuttle**

By late Friday evening, it was apparent that the most valuable immediate assistance that UCT could give was to help other organizations with transport from collection points to

refugee centres. UCT availed the Jammie Shuttle fleet as of Friday, 23 May and we worked in partnership with SAPS Rondebosch and Superintendent Hubbard. Overnight and on the morning of Saturday, we transported about 500 people from Rondebosch, the Cape Town CBD and the Claremont CBD to temporary places of safety made available by churches, mosques and other organizations and we have busses on standby and available at Rondebosch police station.

The refugees were transported from Rondebosch to the various shelters in Jammie Shuttles through Friday night, first until 10:00pm when the doors at the Rondebosch church had to be closed and then through the night for other refugees who also came to the Rondebosch police station, since word spread quickly that this was a place of safety.

We continued to provide transport through Saturday and into Saturday evening, and again on Sunday until midday, when the busses were stood down to give drivers a break and to prepare for resuming the full scheduled weekday service at 6.00am on the Monday morning (essential for examination support). By the time the busses stood down we had transported about 2000 people to places of safety. We undertook to resume emergency transport assistance if requested by Rondebosch SAPS.

- **Coordination liaison with SAPS for family tracing**

From early Friday evening and well into the night and over the weekend, UCT Communications coordinated liaison with SAPS and a number of other organizations. Because families had become separated and were in different temporary refuges, there was a need to help track down where people are currently housed. UCT Communications had a team of student volunteers on standby to get out to the refugee centres and help with this if asked to.

- **Student housing**

We had identified several emergency holding sites on our campus in case the capacity of civil society organizations which were at the forefront of the response was exceeded, and had 200 mattresses ready. Because of examinations and the fact that UCT venue capacity is stretched, we held back on supplying holding sites – we were rather able to work with other organizations and help with transport.

We were able to provide 200 mattresses from the residence system to the United Church in Belmont Road – these and other intermediate holding points were stretched for mattresses, blankets and food.

- **Safety of UCT student and staff**

We were, and continue to be, concerned for the safety of UCT staff and students who may be caught up in the crisis. We provided advice to a number of people but realized that a lot more had to be done to contact and support those who may be affected. We have attempted to make individual contact with all those whom we believe may be affected, and put in place 24-hour emergency contact numbers for staff and students from Friday evening through the weekend.

By Sunday a number of UCT staff and students had expressed concern and contacted our emergency numbers but, to our knowledge no UCT staff member or student has been harmed. However, we still lack complete information and IAPO and HRM are continuing to check with all potentially affected staff and students.

▪ **UCT Open meeting – Crisis Response Task Team**

On Monday, 26 May, the open meeting of the Crisis Response Task Team was attended by about 200 people, including representatives from a range of organizations. A smaller steering group was agreed on. This group's responsibility was to coordinate and develop UCT's response on a day-by-day basis.

There was a clear view from the meeting that we need to expand communication, particularly to the student sector. The SRC undertook to look at this, and a Vula site for this purpose would be set up.

We received updates on the issue of the safe sites, proposed "camps" and the need for clarity before information on refugee legal status and employment details are collected. We decided to wait for advice from the Law Faculty and Law Clinic on this issue.

It was stressed that we must use our influence as an organization to accelerate recognition that a sustainable response is the primary responsibility of government.

Specific steps from the meeting included:

- * setting up a register of those who in the UCT community can accommodate staff and students who feel unsafe in the places where they currently live
- * need to extend volunteers to include staff and students in Social Work, Psychology and trauma counseling
- * in particular, the need to move as quickly as possible from our "first response" position to an approach that uses the expertise of the university to develop informed human rights, analytical and public policy positions. It was stressed that xenophobia must be seen as symptomatic of underlying issues and particularly the consequences of unemployment and economic and social marginalization

The steering group would follow up on the specific outcomes of the open meeting during the week.

▪ **International Academic Programmes Office**

On 26 May, IAPO issued a letter to international students and institutional partners abroad, providing an update of the current crisis and detailing UCT's initiatives thus far. The letter was posted on the UCT corporate website, Vula, and distributed via e-mail to all students and partner organizations.

- **Students and Staff database**

By Tuesday, 27 May, the growing need for a database of UCT staff and students who can accommodate fellow UCT staff and students in emergency need became eminent. We had a small but growing number of UCT staff and students who needed to move from where they were currently living. Some were placed in the residence system but there was a concern that this capacity may soon be exhausted.

- **Social Work and Psychology**

Both Social Work and Psychology held meetings with their staff and students and mobilized volunteers to help with counseling and trauma management. This additional support was coordinated through Health Sciences and SHAWCO Health.

- **SHAWCO**

SHAWCO is organizing the collection of clothing, blankets, food and material assistance from the university community.

The Crisis Response Task Team worked with SHAWCO as the main UCT agency for coordinating direct support, and SHAWCO in turn worked with the TAC and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF).

SHAWCO collection points are at the Steve Biko Building on Upper Campus and the SHAWCO main office on the Health Sciences Campus – these are open from 8.30am weekdays. SHAWCO worked with the residence system to set up collection points at each student residence.

SHAWCO called for tinned food supplies (no perishables), baby supplies (nappies, formula, baby food), blankets and clothes.

SHAWCO also called for volunteers in several areas:

- * support for SHAWCO Health to work with Medecins Sans Frontieres and the TAC.
- * support for the UCT Law Project to help identify, assess, and register the current refugees in terms of legal requirements and Home Affairs documentation.

SHAWCO worked with TAC, Department of Home Affairs, the City of Cape Town, Civil Society Coalition Against Violence and Crime, Students Society for Law and Social Justice, the Sonke Gender Justice Network, the Aids Law Project and the Treatment Action Campaign, with the urgent task of registering those who were being moved to the four major refugee centres in the city. UCT student volunteers made themselves available for the task, and the first training session was at 11.00am on Sunday.

SHAWCO volunteers worked through much of Sunday with the AIDS Law Project and other organizations to complete a rapid assessment of health needs across 33 centres in the Greater Cape Town area. They were able to collect information on 8 969 people through the day, but reported that there were many others whose needs still had to be assessed.

The SRC worked with SHAWCO, and UCT Radio to provide full information and encourage participation as of Monday, 26th May. In particular, the call made was for the donation of blankets, nappies and nappy cream, infant formula, sanitary towels, soap and basic first aid supplies.

On Monday, 26 May, the City of Cape Town's Health section and Provincial Health Department met, along with other partner organizations including UCT Health Sciences and SHAWCO Health, and developed a combined plan that opposes consolidation in large camps and seeks to provide health support for those affected as close as possible to where they live, to assist re-integration into the community. We continue to work closely with both City Health and Provincial Health.

By Wednesday, 28 May, Civil Society organisations (headed up by ARASA for purposes of efficiency) were asked to let the City Health and Provincial Health Department teams know what they can offer in terms of health response. Civil society organizations, including SHAWCO, in turn, asked them for broad categories so that they would have an idea of what sort of things would be helpful to offer. Their response was:

- a) Doctors, nurses, counsellors and clerks willing to do sessions on rosters at the health posts at the 4 centralised sites (i.e. refugee camps);
- b) Nurses, health educators to do sessions on rosters as part of the "sub-district health teams", doing daily visits to all other smaller sites (e.g. churches, mosques, community centres);
- c) General, basic medical supplies to replenish first aid kits (e.g. bandages, paracetamol, disinfectant).

SHAWCO Health also met with SHAWCO drivers and has offered the use of their mobile clinic, as well as students to operate the clinic, on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings (around 18h00-22h30) and on Saturday morning (09h00-14h30). SHAWCO has since also had contact with the Department of Family Medicine who might be able to offer some of their post-grad students as supervisors, as well as some students at GSB who happen also to be qualified doctors, possibly offering a whole "package" sooner than anticipated.

A letter was also sent to all health students to let them know all the various ways in which they can help, including volunteering in SHAWCO Health's clinics. Volunteer forms would also be distributed and then returned to the Undergraduate office and to SHAWCO Head Office where a database of volunteers will be built for the SHAWCO clinics.

- **Health Sciences Faculty**

This issue of refugee location – whether dispersed sites or four camps – also impinges on our third area of focus, health provision, because of the need to set up temporary pharmacies, clinics and other infrastructure. This is an urgent issue, because an outbreak of diarrhea in one of the larger temporary sites had been reported. A planning meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, 27 May, coordinated by Provincial Health Department. UCT was represented by SHAWCO Health and others, working closely with our Faculty of Health Sciences, TAC and other partners.

In preparation for this, the Dean of the Health Sciences Faculty called a meeting on Sunday afternoon with the class representatives for the various years in the MBChB programme and also the Rehab Sciences and the Health Sciences Students Council. The class representatives would use the Faculty's SMS data base to build up a contact network of students with clinical experience who can be deployed to the refugee holding sites in support of SHAWCO Health, and as part of the Provincial Health overall plan which would be outlined later in the week.

- **UCT Law Clinic**

At approximately 2:00pm on Friday 23 May, a large group of refugees (approximately 200) came to our Law Clinic offices having fled these violent attacks seeking our assistance. The Law Clinic realised that it would be impossible to provide them with a legal assistance because they were severely traumatized, and instead as the situation demanded they provided an emergency assistance. The Law Clinic also realised that it was not a task that they could carry out on their own. With the assistance of the Rondebosch police, initially at the Police Station and later at Rondebosch United Congregation church, they managed to place 1057 refugees in shelters in and around Rondebosch.

By the end of Friday, the Law Clinic had logged all the displaced people that were assisted with the Cape Town Disaster Management team; health care with Medicans Sans Frontier had been organized; and provision was made for the basic needs of the displaced people, including trauma counselling, with members of civil society. At the same time, the Law Clinic was continuously receiving calls from clients who were afraid to leave their homes because of the violence in their areas – this resulted in many fights with police – with Law Clinic demanding that the refugees be brought to places of safety by police.

On Saturday, all work was consolidated. It was brought to the attention of the Law Clinic that some refugees sheltered at the Youngfield military base were denied freedom of movement and virtually held prisoner at the base. The team immediately set out to inform the Commander in charge that it is unconstitutional to deny the refugees rights granted to them in terms of our law. Refugees from the base were allowed to leave the base if they so wish and would not be forced to remain there.

The UCT Law Clinic continued coordinating and leading refugee support. However, a problem emerged and they held back on support until it was resolved. Refugees were dispersed across more than 30 sites and the City of Cape Town announced that it wished to move them to four camps. There was disagreement about the amount – and type – of information that should be collected from displaced people in these four camps, both in terms of UN conventions and constitutional rights, and also because refugees fear that they may be forcibly repatriated if they move to the camps. There was also apparently disagreement between the City and the Department of Home Affairs. The UCT Law Clinic would advise when this had been resolved.

On Monday, the UCT Law Clinic continued to provide direct assistance to refugees who visited their offices on campus, and also facilitated meetings with the representative of the UN High Commission for Refugees, Mr. Gupta, who had arrived in Cape Town. On this day, the UCT Law Clinic saw about 500 people at their offices on Middle Campus.

The Law Clinic – and the Law Faculty – remained concerned about protocols for collecting information and were opposed to the data forms currently being used by Cape Town Disaster Management. Assurances were sought on the moratorium on prosecution and deportation while meetings continued with the UNHCR. The Cape Bar Association – through the intervention of members of the UCT Council and others – assembled a list of its members prepared to act *pro bono* for refugees referred to them by the UCT Law Clinic.

- **Meeting with UNHCR**

We benefitted from a comprehensive briefing on Tuesday, 27 May from Mr. Arvin Gupta, Senior Protection Officer for the UN High Commission for Refugees, who has been working closely with the UCT Law Clinic. Mr. Gupta had had the opportunity of visiting a number of holding sites, meeting with provincial and city officials (including the Mayor) and meeting with leaders of refugee communities. He was concerned about the apparent lack of common purpose on the part of local and provincial government and, in particular, about the current registration process at the "camps" where information is being collected in apparent contravention of legal authority. This issue is being actively pursued by the UCT Law Clinic with the assistance of the Cape Bar Association. There is a clear need to protect the rights of refugees and displaced foreign nationals in terms of the immigration legislation and the Refugees Act of 1998 which, among other provisions, entitles a refugee to an appropriate identity document, full legal protection and the right to stay in South Africa.

- **Examinations**

The crisis takes place amidst the June examinations. Each Faculty would ask all invigilators in examinations to be aware that students could be severely distressed, and to collect any such information systematically (student name, number and comment on the specifics), so that UCT can manage the consequences through the Deferred Examination Committee.

- **Centre for Educational Technology**

A Vula site was set up for discussion/ debate/ information. The site is available to all members of the university at the following url:

<https://vula.uct.ac.za/portal/site/9f9be7fb-bf4c-4f03-91fa-7287f9585018>

You can add the site to your Vula tabs by logging into Vula, and going to Membership-Joinable sites and joining the Refugee Crisis site.

Information is continually being updated on Vula.

- **Communications and Marketing Department**

On the corporate UCT website, the Communications and Marketing Department created a banner titled, "*UCT Response to Refugee Crisis*". The following items were posted on the page:

- VC statement to staff and students
- VC update to staff and students on UCT's response
- HESA statement: SA universities mobilize in the face of xenophobia
- IAPO letter to students and partners
- Monday Paper article on UCT's 'first response' during crisis

The Communications and Marketing Department also handled media queries with regard to UCT's efforts during the xenophobic crisis.

- **Campus Vendors**

We are concerned about the impact of the current crisis on the licenced vendors who serve the campus, and have had one report of an attack on one of the most popular of these vendors. Support will be provided.

- **Visible solidarity**

Following discussion at Monday's Crisis Response Task Team meeting and subsequent suggestions, the task team decided to mark solidarity with the victims of xenophobia and violence with a white ribbon, which members of the UCT community will be asked to wear on their wrists. We will invite all students graduating on June 13th (as well as others at the ceremony) to wear the ribbon. This will be particularly appropriate because many of our graduates will be foreign nationals and will be welcomed at the ceremony as life members of UCT Convocation. SHAWCO will be helping organizing this.

Communication to staff and students in this regard, has been issued.

- **Steering Group**

The steering group that was set up at Monday's meeting met jointly with the UCT Executive on Friday, 30 May (12.00-1.30pm) to take stock of the situation at UCT, and review UCT's "first response" to the crisis.

- **Moving beyond 'first response'**

Now that we have a continuing and focused engagement with the current crisis through the work of SHAWCO, SHAWCO Health and the Health Sciences Faculty, and the UCT Law Clinic and the Law Faculty, we will be moving beyond our "first response" and looking to the urgent and continuing issues of helping with understanding causes and pushing for effective public policy and more appropriate state responses to human rights issues.

A strong view expressed at the Open meeting on Monday, 26 May and the Crisis Response Task Team meeting with the Executive, was the need to focus on UCT's next phase of engagement, drawing on the considerable expertise in different parts of the university.

- **Acknowledgement and Recognition**

We have deliberately avoided mentioning individuals by name in this report. This is because the UCT response has been so extensive that to attempt the individual recognition of one person would, invariably, be to fail to mention ten others. Engagement with the crisis has ranged from Deans and Executive Directors to first year students and has included a wide range of professional, administrative support staff and partner organizations. The response by the UCT community to this crisis has been magnificent, and continues to be so.

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