



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

SOUTH AFRICA - Civil Strife

Date: May 18-23, June 10-11, 1986

Location: Crossroads squatter camp, about 19 km southeast of Cape Town

No. Dead: 62 (according to newspaper reports) - 48 were killed in the first round of violence and 14 in the second

No. Affected: 60,000-70,000 (35,000 from the first round)

The Disaster

According to press reports, the South African Government (SAG) had attempted for more than a decade to move residents from Crossroads, a black squatter camp not far from Cape Town, to either the Transkei "homeland" or to another black settlement further away from Cape Town. However, residents refused to be moved. Finally in 1985, the SAG agreed to allow about 40,000 of the approximately 85,000 residents to stay in Crossroads and to upgrade the settlement to a "model urban community" with paved roads and urban services. The remaining people were to be moved to the new town of Khayelitsha, 10 km away.

This proposal appealed to many of the 47,000 residents of Old Crossroads, the oldest section of the settlement. Newer residents did not want to be moved out of Crossroads, fearing that they would actually be "moved" to one of the rural "homelands." Antagonism between the two groups erupted into violence on the night of May 18 when about 1,000 vigilantes, from Old Crossroads, calling themselves the Witdoeke ("white rags," after the strips of white cloth which they tied around their necks or pinned to their clothes), attacked the young activists, known as the Comrades, from the satellite sections.

The battle raged for five days until, after setting fire to the shanties in the three satellite sections, the vigilantes finally prevailed. Forty-eight people lay dead; 120 were seriously wounded; and 35,000 residents of the burned out sections were left homeless, forced to seek shelter in community centers or remain in the surrounding bush. The militant Comrades retained control of only one section. On June 10, the

vigilantes moved to take over the Comrades' last bastion, and a pitched battle was fought for two days. The Witdoeke expelled the Comrades and burned the remaining shanties.

Action Taken by the South African Government (SAG) and Local Non-Governmental Organizations

According to the U.S. State Department, reports of police complicity with the vigilantes were widespread. The SAG denied this charge, but South African security forces moved into the Crossroads area after the fighting stopped and bulldozed the burned out sections. The SAG provided a limited amount of shelter, food, and clothing only at Khayelitsha, the site where the SAG had originally wanted to move the squatters.

Several local NGOs provided the bulk of relief assistance to the displaced persons. The South African Red Cross fed 12,000 people daily for more than two months; this covered 77 percent of the total feeding effort. The Red Cross also set up satellite kitchens away from the refugee centers and provided the homeless with kits of stoves, fuel, soap, plastic, and cooking utensils.

St. John's Ambulance provided food for slightly more than 2,000 per day and ambulance service to the townships. The Students' Health and Welfare Committee (SHAWCO), an organization of medical students at University of Cape Town, fed 1,500 people daily and organized mobile clinics to provide medical care. The Nyanga East Zone Committee, the Rotary Club, and the Mbekweni Residents Association also provided relief to the homeless. The latter group comprises the black leadership of a community of 80 families displaced by the fighting at Crossroads. The organization distributed resettlement kits containing food, wood, plastic, and cooking fuel.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government

On May 19, 1986, U.S. Ambassador Herman W. Nickel declared that the situation at Crossroads warranted OFDA disaster assistance. The U.S. Mission and OFDA decided to provide grants to those local private voluntary agencies providing assistance to the victims of the violence at Crossroads. The grants were distributed as follows:

South African Red Cross - \$146,600
SHAWCO - \$31,720
St. John's Ambulance - \$50,000
Mbekweni Residents Association - \$15,000
Nyanga East Zone Committee - \$5,000

TOTAL \$248,320