

HIGH COURT OVERTURNS BAN ON KOPANANG AFRICA'S ANTI-XENOPHOBIA MARCH

By Karibu! Staff

As of 25 March 2022, a High Court judgment has overturned the ban on the Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia (KAAX) march that was set to take place on Human Rights Day. This means that activists, community members and social justice organisations in support of KAAX will be gathering at Peter Roos Park in Parktown on Saturday, 26 March, and marching through the streets of the Johannesburg CBD to the Museum Africa in Newtown.

The court challenge to the ban was argued by advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi at an urgent High Court hearing held on the Teams digital meeting platform on 24 March. Ngcukaitobi stepped in as legal representation for KAAX, with the assistance of the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of SA (SERI).

KAAX organisers were informed a mere days before the march's set date of the banning by the Johannesburg Metro Police. KAAX organisers were told that the reason for this was 'due to safety concerns', following threats of disruptions and similar threats issued by Operation Dudula.

"They essentially told us that because Operation Dudula has been issuing threats they cannot allow us to march," said Dale McKinley to Eye Witness News. "They've also indicated that a fake press release was doing the rounds, indicating that our march was going to be by illegal immigrants against the laws of South Africa."

KAAX, coalition of organisations and activists, came together in February 2022 in response to the xenophobic movement currently organised under the banner of Operation Dudula, and led by controversial public figure Nhlanhla 'Lux' Dhlamini. Though it is still unclear who is backing 'Lux' and Operation Dudula, 'Lux' became a prominent public figure during the July riots in 2021, as armed civilian defender of Maponya Mall.

Though Operation Dudula is currently concentrated in the Soweto and Alexandra areas, other areas around Gauteng such as Daveyton (on the East Rand) and the Johannesburg innercity/Hillbrow area have also experienced violent xenophobic incidents recently. Multiple reports detail how groups of Dudula members have been enforcing forced removals of foreign national shop-owners, inciting violence against foreign nationals, looting, and forcible home evictions, all under the guise of 'cleaning up the community' and 'addressing the community's social ills'.

In contrast to the handling of KAAX's march, the South African Police Services (SAPS) has done very little to stop Operation Dudula's activities, often standing by and watching as Dudula members wreak havoc. There have even been reports of SAPS being directly involved in some of these incidents.

These experiences of SAPS and Operation Dudula are indicative of the growing xenophobic sentiments in South African society that is taking root both within government institutions and outside. They also serve as a warning for progressive and working class formations to organise seriously against these reactionary movements of the right.