

MARSHALLTOWN FIRE: WHY DID THE STATE LIE?

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Date: 8 October 2023

After the devastating 80 Albert Street Fire in Johannesburg's Marshalltown last month, civil society-led Johannesburg Fire Response Action Group conducted in-depth interviews with survivors to determine the humanitarian response. Data was collected through meticulous interviews and is being used to determine the humanitarian response from civil society.

The data shows that the majority of people affected by the fire are South Africans (*see table below*). The facts contradict the dominant narrative of politicians and other state officials who since the fire have bent over backwards to use scapegoating of migrants and social justice NGOs to avoid taking responsibility for the dreadful state of Johannesburg's inner-city buildings.

This inadequate response has led to further tragedies, including the death of a woman denied medical treatment post-fire due to lack of documentation. Xenophobic attitudes at clinics meant that fire victims, whose loved ones were critically injured, were barred from access to bid them farewell. (*See Appendix 1 for further first-hand stories*).

That the majority of the people that were affected by the fire were South Africans is incidental at this point. The fact that the Gauteng Province's response was not informed by concern for the tragic loss of life and the suffering that the survivors of this fire experienced should be a warning to all. The Gauteng Province and the City of Joburg are looking at elections in 2024. And this is what is informing how they respond to this tragic humanitarian crisis.

The majority of media stories about the fire have worked in lockstep with the false narratives of the state. At no point did these media houses do the work of collecting real facts to challenge the dangerous tone emerging around blaming the victims. If they did, these were not used to expose the truth. This is irresponsible reporting, that perilously feeds scapegoating and xenophobic violence in our communities.

NATIONALITY	Female	Male	Gender unknown	Children	Total Adults	Grand Total
SOUTH AFRICA	103	89	14	58	206	264
MALAWI	19	65	16	13	100	113

Tanzania	6	86	0	1	92	93
Kenya	0	1	0	2	1	3
Mocambique	3	0	0	0	3	3
Swaziland	1	0	0	0	1	1
Lesotho	2	0	0	3	2	5
Zimbabwe	9	2	4	4	15	19
Total	143	243	34	81	420	501