



Cardinal Stephen Brislin
Archbishop of Johannesburg

Message to all Parishes of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

The present situation of certain groups preventing non-South Africans from accessing medical facilities and schools is deeply abhorrent. We have witnessed such events in Yeoville and Soweto a few days ago. There have also been disturbing reports of law enforcement personnel abdicating their responsibility, standing by idly amidst the clashes.

Across the world there are attempts to prevent and criminalise migration as well as ratcheting up xenophobic discourses and activities, thereby undermining social cohesion. Let us be very clear. Irrespective of legal status, all have a right in South Africa to access medical care and a right to schooling. Let us also be clear that no group has the authority to abrogate the prerogative of law enforcement by mob action, as these groups are doing at clinics and schools. Equally, official law enforcement agents are duty bound to protect all people when in harms way - again irrespective of documentation. Not to do so is a dereliction of duty and should be met with strong consequences.

Our Scriptures and Church teaching are clear of this subject. Exodus 22:21 says 'Do not mistreat or oppress the foreigner for you were once foreigners in Egypt.' Leviticus 19:33 adds 'When an alien resides with you in your land....do not oppress them.' Deuteronomy 27:19 is very clear. 'Cursed is anyone who denies justice to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow'. Jesus picks up the teaching and in the famous Sermon on the Mount, saying categorically 'When I was a stranger you welcomed me.' Again in Hebrews 13:2 we read, 'Do not forget to show hospitality to the stranger, for in doing so some people have welcomed angels unaware.'

Our Social Teaching Tradition adds to this, insisting that human dignity, and all human rights, arise from our being created in the image and likeness of God, and not by legal status. All people have the right to protection, including the right to be protected from illness, vulnerability and harm. These are principles which the church honours.

Furthermore, the actions of preventing people from receiving health care and education are contrary to the Constitution, the Judgements of our Courts, the Directives of the Government Departments and the assurances of the respective Ministers. In the face of these clear legal guarantees, I consider the actions of these groups to lack any moral purpose and instead they contribute to normalising the politics of exclusion and deprivation. It is worth noting that the excuse often used for these misguided actions is that undocumented migrants are draining resources and thus impacting on the well-being of South Africans. If these groups are concerned about lack of resources they should direct their attention to the underlying cause - corruption - rather than bullying the vulnerable.

In the light of the Scriptures and church teachings, which form us and our consciences, and in the light of the law of the land, I ask you to give no support to these misguided and ultimately dangerous activities. They are contrary to our faith.

Stephen Cardinal Brislin
Archbishop of Johannesburg



30th September 2025.