

Khayelitsha violence directly affects the UCT community

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LAST week, the rectors of UCT and Stellenbosch University released a joint statement supporting the urgent need for a commission of inquiry into policing in Khayelitsha.

Both universities stressed that constructive co-operation between national government and Western Cape provincial government is fundamental to the effectiveness and positive impact of such a commission. There was also recognition that the high level of violence encountered in Khayelitsha also occurs in a number of other South African communities, and that there is more to violence in Khayelitsha than ineffective policing.

A key reason behind UCT's decision to draft the statement with SU is that UCT staff and students, like most people living in South Africa, are affected by violence daily. Less than a week ago Bayanda Baba, a UCT business science student, was fatally shot during an attempted robbery at a bus stop in Gugulethu.

This was not an isolated incident, as other members of the UCT community have been murdered in recent years, such as students Dominic Giddy and Benny Paldiso Maqobane, and professors Kevin Rochford and Mike Larkin.

Consequently, many academics at UCT hold the firm conviction that a Khayelitsha commission of inquiry should be the point of departure for a wider examination of violence in the Western Cape and other provinces.

South Africa consistently has one of the highest recorded murder rates in the world, and the highest in Africa, with 15 609 murders having been reported to the police in the 2011/12 financial year. In the same year there were more than 600 000 other reported violent crimes, which included attempted murder, sexual crimes, assault and robberies with aggravating circumstances.

This meant that at least one in every 100 people living in South Africa was a victim of violent crime last year. Of great concern is that the level of violence may be more severe

Far-reaching investigations into violence in SA are essential

than official statistics reveal. Evidence from Medical Research Council studies suggest incidents of violence are drastically under-reported, with estimates that 1.25 million people in South Africa seek medical assistance for non-fatal, violence-related injuries every year.

Rates of violence are substantially higher in poorer communities, particularly in urban areas. In the Western Cape, a quarter of all reported violent crimes in 2011/12 were committed in 10 of the poorest urban policing precincts (out of 141 precincts). These include: Nyanga, Gugulethu, Kraaifontein, Delft, Mfuleni, Mitchells Plain, Phillipi East, Bishop Lavis, Khayelitsha and

Harare. Close to half of all murders and 26 762 reported violent crimes in the province took place in these 10 policing areas.

Evidence from international and South African research suggests risk factors for violence are multi-faceted. Links between poor community access to government resources and services (including policing) and violence are well documented.

Socio-economic conditions such as poverty, high unemployment and underprivileged education are crucial in understanding insecurity.

Studies on perpetrators of violence, particularly young men, indicate that substance abuse, mental illness, stress, low impulse control, lack of conflict management skills and the prevalence of gangs are key risk factors. Research findings also suggest that masculine identities and norms that venerate violence are key ingredients for violent behaviour.

More far-reaching investigations into violence in South Africa are essential, as an absence of safety is widely recognised as a fundamental obstacle to prosperity. This is

acknowledged by the government through the National Development Plan 2030, which states: "When communities do not feel safe and live in fear, the country's economic development and the people's well-being are affected, hindering their ability to achieve their potential."

The plan therefore calls for an integrated approach to safety and security that "will require co-ordinated activity across a variety of (government) departments, the private sector and community bodies".

It is encouraging that both President Jacob Zuma and the ANC have recently indicated that this document will be a principal guide for government policy for the foreseeable future. However, it is important that the safety components of the plan are prioritised.

The Western Cape government has highlighted safety as one of its governance objectives, and is seeking "to make every community in the province a safe place in which to live, work, learn, relax and move about". The provincial government has stated that it will achieve this by

working in partnership with civil society, business and individuals.

The Community Safety Bill is in the process of being finalised by the Western Cape provincial government. Nonetheless, the draft bill almost exclusively focuses on policing and policing oversight, and neglects other aspects of and risk factors relating to violence. If the provincial government intends to have a more pronounced impact on promoting safety, then it is crucial for this draft bill to have a more inclusive approach to violence.

UCT management and many academics believe the institution has an ethical responsibility to contribute meaningfully to knowledge and dialogue on understanding and responding to violence, as well as promoting safety in South Africa. As a result, UCT has established the Safety and Violence Initiative (SaVI) to facilitate debate, research and interventions across the university, and to bring together scholars from most academic faculties.

● *Lamb is Director of the Safety and Violence Initiative (SaVI) at UCT.*