

Have a heart for those fellow Africans now desperately fleeing our country

Daily Maverick by Mark Heywood

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Most people from other African countries are not here because they want to be, but because their countries have been ruined by corrupt elites. Turning our anger on them instead of those elites is the most inhumane and cowardly thing to do.



Photo added from Internet featuring a march in Pretoria: 28 April 2026 Photo credit: Reuters

A sad thing happened to me on the way to work.

Last week, I was driving in Northcliff, a residential upper-middle class suburb of Johannesburg, when I was flagged down by a middle-aged man, probably about 45.

I'm not sure why I stopped. Maybe he just caught my eyes or I caught his. A connection. He was well dressed, well spoken, an ordinary working person.

As I pulled over he stuttered that he wasn't a criminal or hijacker. The thought had crossed my mind, but I'd dismissed it.

We began to talk. Very quickly he started to sob uncontrollably. Between heaves he told me that he is from Zimbabwe, that he is married, that he has a three-year-old daughter, and that he had just been chased out of his home in Hillbrow "by ANC". He said he had witnessed somebody being killed or very badly beaten the day before, and that now he "just has to get out of South Africa". He had been here for six years and said he didn't have documents.

"I'm desperate to get out of the country."

After telling his story, he pleaded for money. He told me he needed R1,400 so that he could go to Park Station in the centre of Johannesburg and hire a bakkie that could take his family back to Bulawayo.

While telling me all of this he continued sobbing.

In a safe and beautiful suburb, the road quietly sloping down the side of Joburg's North Cliff, the incongruity and horror of what I was hearing nonplussed me... the tragedy. I realised this is the human story of what is happening to human beings, our brothers and sisters from other African countries, as a result of a wave of arbitrary, random, misdirected violence and the anger that is being cynically seeded in our country.

And on a human level it just felt awful.

I wanted to break down, there and then, listening to him. I couldn't. These words are my tears.

I thought about giving him the money he needed. For a fleeting moment I wondered if I was being misled. But just as quickly another thought told me that even if I am, here is somebody who is desperate, maybe "just" desperately hungry, if not desperately driven from his home.

What's the difference in human terms?

It became a moment of reckoning with my own humanity. To show human empathy and compassion; to do something or drive away. I asked his name. "Donald." I took his number. An hour later I sent him R1,500 by e-wallet... so that he could flee our country and go home to Bulawayo.

Messers March on March, Operation Dudula, ActionSA, MKP. Congratulations. Mission accomplished. One more vulnerable person, broken a bit more, chased away by people who are starting something that I don't think they know how to finish.

Is this what you want?

The truth of it is that most people from other African countries are not in our country because they want to be. Some may be criminals, but the vast majority are not. They're here because their countries, Zimbabwe, Eswatini/Swaziland and Mozambique, have been captured by corrupt elites who have ruined local economies, stolen public wealth, taken it all for themselves, and made it impossible for ordinary people to live and make a living in their own agriculturally and mineral rich countries.

The truth is that those corrupt governments and their elites are propped up by our own government.

South Africa is friends with King Mswati III, the last absolute monarch in Africa, fabulously, incredibly rich – on the back of the poverty of the amaSwati.

We are friends with Emmerson Mnangagwa, the president of Zimbabwe – "the crocodile" – one of the most corrupt politicians in the world. Despite the devastation he has caused in his country, Cyril paid him and his cronies a private visit recently.

We're friends with the government of Mozambique, the crooks who stole the 2024 election.

And so on and so on.

So, the anger of the mobs who are being inflamed against African migrants is misdirected. I wish that people could understand that turning our anger on the poor rather than the rich and the elites and their corruption is the worst thing to do, the most inhumane thing to do. The most cowardly thing to do.

If you had seen Donald, witnessed his tears, considered the fear that had entered his life, I think – I hope – that you would understand and stop what you are doing. You still can. DM

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