

concerns around the current crisis to serve as a catalyst to deal with the deeper problems confronting South Africa. He labelled poverty a “social crisis” of enormous proportion and said that he hoped we would work together to develop plans of actions. Minister Skweyiya requested that a proposal be put together to be submitted to the Ministry, which we have done.

The support received from colleagues within and across Africa, particularly from the International Federation of Social Workers and the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa has been phenomenal, reflecting that social work practitioners and educators are interested in pursuing the political aspects of social work. Nigel Hall sent the following message on the COSW distribution list.

The quick response from the social work community has also been warmly applauded by social work educators and practitioners from across the continent. The IFSW Africa President and COSW Board Member Charles Mbugua as sent a message to the South African consortium as follows: “Bravo!!! This is a major step forward in that our concern in this crisis has been noted at such a high level and secondly, our contribution to the solution of the problem is valued and ‘we have a space’. Rarely, few governments embrace with both hands what we as social workers say or offer, and this is on of those few occasions.”

As social workers we must be concerned about challenge and address those macro level socio-economic factors that render some groups of people privileged and other groups of people marginalized, excluded and oppressed. Xenophobia is, undoubtedly, symptomatic of a society in crises, with South Africa characterised by high rates of unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, inequality and preventable diseases, including nutritional disorders, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. As social workers we must listen and respond to these crises if we are going to play a part in preventing the kind of genocidal madness that ravaged Rwanda in 1994. Socio-economic differences, rather than ethnicity per se, are what Diamond (2005) stresses as a factor in genocide, with excessive inequality between the haves and have-nots, clearly contributing to conflict. Jared Diamond (2005:328) frames it starkly but most poignantly in relation to the genocide in Rwanda:

All these people who were about to be killed had land and at times cows. And somebody had to get these lands and those cows after the owners were dead. In a poor and increasingly overpopulated country this was not a negligible incentive ... The people whose children had to walk barefoot to school killed the people who could buy shoes for theirs.

REFERENCES

DIAMOND, J. 2005. **Collapse: how societies choose to fail or survive.** London: Penguin Books.

Prof Vishanthie Sewpaul, Senior Professor, School of Social Work and Community Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.