Academics condemn attack on settlement

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PROMINENT lawyers and academics have blamed “powerful local property and political interests” for violence in the Kennedy Road informal settlement in Durban, which left two people dead on Saturday.

Two people were killed and several were injured on Saturday when about 40 men carrying assegais, knobkerries, spears and guns attacked the settlement during a youth camp held by the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement, a shack-dwellers’ organisation. Eight people were arrested over the incident.

The academics include senior counsel and former United Nations rapporteur on Palestine John Dugard, the University of Stellenbosch’s Sandy Liebenberg, Rhodes University’s Peter Vale and Martin Legassick as well as Jonathan Klaaren of the University of the Witwatersrand. They also demanded that those Abahlali baseMjondolo members who lost their homes in the attacks be compensated.

A joint statement read: “It seems, regrettably, that Abahlali baseMjondolo’s peaceful efforts to organise and mobilise communities for change and to resist the forced removals from the Kennedy Road settlement threaten powerful local property and political interests. Because of this, it seems, they have been met with violent repression reminiscent of apartheid.

“We are particularly shocked by the allegations of police complicity in these attacks.”

The Abahlali baseMjondolo movement has accused the police of knowing about the attack in advance, and doing nothing about it — a charge the police denied.

KwaZulu-Natal safety MEC Willies Mchunu said yesterday a task team would be established to “hunt down” those responsible. Mchunu, other government officials and community leaders resolved to take immediate action during a visit to the area.

They resolved to place the settlement under 24-hour policing. “We condemn the killing of our people. It is absurd for anyone to impose an illegal curfew on residents,” Mchunu said.