

# African asylum seekers injured in Tel Aviv race riots

Violence breaks out after inflammatory speeches as protesters join politicians to demonstrate against rising Israeli immigration

Wednesday 23 May 2012 –By The Guardian



Hundreds demonstrate in the impoverished Hatikva neighborhood of south Tel Aviv against the African migrant community. Photograph: Roni Schutzer/AFP/Getty Images

Dozens of African asylum seekers were injured as race riots broke out in Tel Aviv on Wednesday night.

Thousands of protesters joined politicians to [protest](#) against the arrival of an estimated 60,000 asylum seekers in [Israel](#) in recent years. But after inflammatory speeches the demonstration broke out into violence.

Witnesses reported seeing men and women being beaten and shops and properties being attacked. Police said nine people were arrested.

The protesters were addressed by politicians including Miri Regev and Danny Danon of the ruling Likud Party. According to the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, Regev described the asylum seekers as a "cancer in our body," and promised to do everything "in order to bring them back to where they belong".

Danny Danon, who heads a lobby group which seeks to deal with the issue of illegal immigration, said the only solution to the problem would be to "begin talking about expulsion".

"We must expel the infiltrators from Israel. We should not be afraid to say the words 'expulsion now'," he was reported as saying.

Thousands of asylum seekers have arrived in Israel from Eritrea and South Sudan, escaping poverty but also oppressive regimes and political instability. Most are bound for Europe, but find Libya blocked to them by the government and civil war.

Often travellers are taken to Israel by Bedouin people smugglers, abused and held to ransom for months at a time before they are deposited on the border where Israel is building a new fence. Once in Israel, they are looked after by Israeli non-governmental agencies and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Some work illegally and the majority live in the poorest areas of Tel Aviv where they find themselves in competition with working class Israelis mostly from a Middle Eastern or north African background. The sparse greens and parks of south Tel Aviv are dominated by the African migrants who sleep there at night.

Anger has been growing in the city and earlier this year the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the migrants threatened the Jewish character of Israel.