



4th August 2008

Press Statement: Wits Law Clinic and CoRMSA Launch Legal Action against Government to Ensure Sustainable Reintegration Process

Following the violence that displaced tens of thousands of people in Gauteng, there has been no clear communication from government as to how it intends to reintegrate those remaining in the temporary safe sites across the province. Last week marked the 31st July deadline that government had initially set to close the temporary sites yet it is apparent that there is still no comprehensive reintegration plan. As a result, Wits Law Clinic and CoRMSA have had little choice but to approach the court to keep the temporary sites open until a comprehensive reintegration plan is in place.

Last week, with the 31st July deadline looming, site managers had still not been informed whether the camps would remain open into August and contracts for security and catering had not yet been renewed. As such, some started making arrangements to dismantle the sites. “We had visited some of the sites including the site at Rifle Range and found that no clear plan had been presented to those living in the site. Instead, people were being encouraged to leave the site and ‘go and live with friends’. We felt this was not acceptable as a ‘reintegration strategy’ and have thus taken the matter to court”, said Tesneem Bhamjee of the Wits Law Clinic.

The application will ask the court to:

1. Order government to communicate and implement a comprehensive reintegration strategy that adequately protects the rights of all.
2. Order government to restore the Rifle Range temporary safe site and refrain from dismantling it until such time as this comprehensive reintegration strategy is in place.

The lack of communication over the future of the displaced foreign nationals has led to increased anxieties and fears in the camps. Many have fled traumatic situations in their own countries and sought safety in South Africa only to be re-traumatised by the recent violence. The ongoing uncertainty about whether it will be safe to live outside of the temporary sites has had a significantly negative effect on people’s mental health. “There have been reports from some of the camps that people are suicidal. People have become depressed and have lost hope during the recent xenophobic attacks, and the lack of clarity around their immediate future has exacerbated their feelings of helplessness. Given what they have already been through, it is important that they know what plans are being made to guarantee their safety once they leave these sites”, said Marivic Garcia-Mall of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

CoRMSA approached the Provincial Government early in July with an offer to assist in the process of reintegrating displaced foreign nationals but as yet has received no formal response. CoRMSA is a member of a civil society 'Reintegration Working Group' that has developed a clear strategy to reintegrate the thousands of displaced foreign nationals back into communities in a way that aims to address the root causes of conflict. This aims to ensure that no such incidents of mass violence are repeated. Any successful reintegration strategy requires a partnership between civil society and government and CoRMSA is hopeful that government will respond to this offer of assistance.

For more information, please contact:

Tesneem Bhamjee, Wits Law Clinic	011 717 8552 or 0836119530
Sicel'mpilo Shange-Buthane, CoRMSA	011 717 4047 or 0765698364
Duncan Breen, CoRMSA	011 717 4699 or 0722000383
Marivic Garcia-Mall, CSVR	011 403 5102 or 0766176246