



CoRMSA NEWSLETTER #1

16th October 2007

Welcome to the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa Newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information and updates that are occurring in the refugee and migration sector. The newsletter is open to all interested parties.

CoRMSA introduction

First of all we'd like to briefly introduce ourselves as the new staff of CoRMSA (formerly the National Consortium for Refugee Affairs). Mpilo Shange-Buthane and I started work at CoRMSA at the beginning of September. Both of us have previously worked in different capacities with refugees and migrants and are looking forward to the new challenges our position as advocacy officers of CoRMSA brings. We would also like to express our thanks to our partner and other affiliate organisations for their support for us thus far.

Access to Refugee Reception Offices

Gauteng

Access to the Refugee Reception Offices appears to still pose a number of challenges. In Gauteng there have been numerous concerns about the closure of the Rosettenville office in Johannesburg and the problems of access to the Marabastad office in Pretoria. A recent visit by the Portfolio Committee for Home Affairs to the Marabastad office labelled conditions there "appalling". The Portfolio Committee has yet to make public the full results of its visit but issues such as applicants having to wait in long queues without access to shelter or ablution facilities, a shortage of DHA staff, a lack of leadership and management, and dirty and poorly furnished office facilities were of immediate concern. (More on this can be found at www.pmg.org.za/viewminute.php?id=9369). There have been further concerns about security outside the Marabastad office and there have been numerous reports of violence and intimidation in the queues. A Task Team from the Forced Migration Working Group is looking into these issues.

The issue of access to the Marabastad and Rosettenville Refugee Reception Offices were dealt with by the Tafira case which was brought to court by Wits Law Clinic. In terms of the judgement, a representative of DHA is required to meet with Wits Law Clinic by 3rd November to demonstrate what steps have been put in place to deal with the issues raised.

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A key part of the Tafira judgement is that anyone **who applied for refugee status at Marabastad or Rosettenville between November 2005 to May 2006** and was not granted the two interviews and issued with a Section 22 permit **is invited to re-apply**. At the time, these offices were pre-screening applications and verbally rejecting applicants or else issuing appointment slips to come back later. **If anyone has personally been affected or knows of anyone who has been affected by either pre-screening or rejecting applications without granting a first interview at the Rosettenville or Marabastad offices between November 2005 and May 2006, please contact Wits Law Clinic on 011 650 8552 or Lawyers for Human Rights on 011 339 1960 as they may be able to assist you to apply for asylum.**

Cape Town

The Cape Town Refugee Reception Office continues to be plagued by obstacles to newly arrived applicants being able to apply for asylum. Despite a reported improvement following the visit by UNHCR High Commissioner Antonio Guterres to Cape Town, there appears to have been a dramatic drop in the level of service from the facility. It seems very few people are being allowed to apply for asylum and the office is honouring the appointments made under the system ruled illegal by the courts. Those with appointments are thus given priority in accessing the office whilst those with Section 23 permits are then accepted. Those wishing to apply for asylum who do not have any form of documentation are thus last in the queue which means that many people are likely to have been attempting to apply for asylum at the office for many months.

People Against Suffering Suppression Oppression and Poverty (PASSOP), a Zimbabwean refugee organisation, organised a protest yesterday outside the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office to draw attention to the crisis of access to the office. On Sunday night PASSOP members and students from the University of Cape Town slept outside the Refugee Reception Office on the Foreshore in solidarity with those who have been sleeping outside the offices in order to gain access. Despite people having queued outside the offices since 4am, it appears that once again no new applicants were interviewed yesterday. The protest proceeded peacefully and was attended by various members of the media. For more details contact Braam Hanekom on 083 256 1140.

Durban

Lawyers for Human Rights in Durban report that they are experiencing similar challenges with access to the Refugee Reception Office there. Long queues are a regular occurrence outside the Reception Office where certain days are reserved for applicants from specific countries as is the practice at the Marabastad office in Pretoria. Of particular concern is that new arrivals appear not to be granted immediate access to apply for asylum but are told by DHA staff to return for initial interviews early next year.

News from Musina

Musina Legal Advice Office has noted that there has appeared to be a slight drop in numbers of Zimbabweans crossing the border in the last two weeks. Otherwise, deportation numbers seem to be fairly stable at around 10 000 people being deported every month.

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Currently the Musina Legal Advice Office's satellite office at the Beitbridge border post is also providing information to those who are looking to apply for asylum in South Africa. They have noted that some nationals of Ethiopia, Rwanda and Burundi have arrived at the border in fairly large groups although there is not yet an indication of how long such groups have been travelling together.

Access to health care

Following lobbying efforts by the UNHCR, LHR and others, the Department of Health issued a circular dated 19th September 2007 confirming that refugees are entitled to the same basic health services as South African citizens are. Further, refugees and asylum seekers with or without a permit who access public health care will undergo the same means test as South African citizens to determine the fees they pay. This means that the hospital will require evidence of income levels or proof that a person is not working. Refugees or asylum seekers with or without permits will not have to pay for Anti-retroviral treatment (ART) at any government health service provider.

Attacks on non-nationals

It is with great concern that we note the attacks that have taken place on Somali and Ethiopian nationals in Delmas, Mpumalanga. Following a service delivery protest by residents, shops owned and staffed by non-nationals were attacked and looted. 40 non-nationals have since fled and are temporarily being accommodated at mosques and with friends. Non-nationals appear to have specifically been the targets of this violence as shops owned by South African citizens were not affected.

CoRMSA attended a meeting in Delmas on Friday (12 October 2007) called by the mayor to address the issues. The meeting featured representatives of those displaced and South African traders from the area. Unfortunately, the mayor was not in attendance and his representative had not been briefed. The municipality have committed themselves to dealing with this issue as a matter of urgency.

In the meantime the non-nationals remain displaced and in need of material assistance. Lawyers for Human Rights (Pretoria) is currently assisting those displaced. Organisations who are able to contribute, please contact Paul on 012 320 2943.

Police arrests

It is with further concern that we note the unlawful arrests of members of Alliance for Refugees in South Africa (AFRISA) in Cape Town last month. Following a raid on a neighbouring office in the same building which was suspected of producing fake identification documents, Immigration officials moved into AFRISA's offices and even arrested those in possession of valid refugee papers and asylum seekers' permits. UCT Law Clinic intervened and secured the release of those arrested.

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Small Grants for Community Organisations

A number of community-based organisations have spoken to us about the challenges they face in terms of funding. We are unfortunately not in a position to assist organisations directly through providing funding. Organisations can however, fill in the attached application form for Atlantic Philanthropies Multi Agency Grants Initiative (MAGI) and return it to Zaide. Her details are listed on the forms.

New Research

On 4th September, the Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP) and the Musina Legal Advice Office released their report entitled *Fact or Fiction? Examining Zimbabwean Cross-Border Migration into South Africa*. The report was based on desk-based research, and interviews and site visits in the Musina area. Interviewees included migrants, residents, business leaders, farmers, the police and the army. Key findings included:

- little evidence of the increase in migration leading to an increase in crime
- media and official reports appear to have exaggerated the numbers of people crossing the border from Zimbabwe
- evidence that blanket statements by the Department of Home Affairs and others that Zimbabweans coming to South Africa are not *bona fide* refugees are inaccurate.
- Evidence that government has devoted increased resources to the border area despite complaints that they 'are not doing enough'.

For a copy of the report and other research, go to FMSP's new website at www.migration.org.za

Outreach

In addition to needing to locate and contact people directly affected by the practices at the Marabastad and Rosettenville as described above, we are also looking to locate the following people to assist our partner organisations:

- Nyasha Kanennyenye is a 31 year old Zimbabwean woman who was arrested in Johannesburg as an illegal immigrant in February this year. It is likely that she has since been deported. Her mother is concerned for her welfare as she has not heard from her since then. We have made contact with the IOM and Zimbabwean Immigration officials but if anyone knows her whereabouts, please contact us urgently.

Events

- **Refugees Speak Out Event:**

The Coordinating Body for Refugee Communities, Refugee Ministries Centre and Sangoco will host the Refugees Speak Out event. This event is to be held on the 17 October 2007 (World Poverty Alleviation Day) at the Metropolitan Civic Centre Chambers in Braamfontein and will comprise of refugees speaking of their experiences. The event is seen as a crucial element on the fight against poverty and marginalization.

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For more information contact: Dosso Ndessomin or Harly Gambanou at 011 403 4429.

- **US Embassy Roundtable Discussion:**

Lawyers for Human Rights and the Wits Forced Migration Studies Programme host a roundtable discussion with Marie Martinez, Migration expert from the US Department of Homeland Security on Friday 19th October from 10am to 12pm. She will be speaking on a wide range of issues including: asylum and refugee protection and the deportation of failed asylum seekers, direct victim assistance in human trafficking cases and NGO-law enforcement collaboration. The venue is the Seminar Room at the SW Engineering Building, Wits.

- **Anti-xenophobia soccer tournament:**

The Mthwakazi Arts and Culture Project together with the Peace and Democracy Project and the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum have organized a football tournament between teams from different African countries (South Africa, Zimbabwe and others) in a bid to counter xenophobia in the greater Johannesburg area. The event will take place on 03 November 2007. Knockouts at Bertrams Recreational Centre near Ellis Park Stadium on 27 October 2007 from 9 until 4.30pm. For more information on this event contact Mr Elliot Moyo at 083 766 0020.

Vacancies

The Trauma and Transition Programme at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation is seeking to recruit a highly motivated Interpreter / clinic assistant (Swahili/French) who will assist clinicians in working with clients who speak a language other than their own for a one year contract (part time). They serve as a bridge between the Clinician and the Client, in translating language as well as cultural nuances. Their responsibilities vary according to the needs of the caseload and their qualifications. This will be a one year contract.

Duties:

- * Acting as Interpreter/ Translator, providing containment and support to clients
- * Escorting clients to relevant service providers and translating for them
- * Doing intake interviews
- * Providing basic information to forced migrants about the TTP Trauma Clinic
- * Assisting with periodic caseload reviews and analyses
- * Co-facilitating community aware campaigns and training workshops
- * Doing clerical tasks related to the forced migrants refugee project
- * Doing home visits
- * Liaising with different refugee communities around the care and support of Clinic clients in need
- * Co-facilitating refugee support groups and interpreting during group sessions
- * Writing brief reports of activities undertaken

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Skills/knowledge and Abilities, Whether working at an individual, group, or community level, the effectiveness of the Clinic assistant/Interpreter will largely depend on how well s/he relates to other people. Such qualities as warmth, empathy, patience, tolerance, the ability to listen, contain one's and the other person's reactions, and a sense of humor are fundamental. Other qualities include a high tolerance for frustration and a thoughtful, objective attitude towards work. Candidates need a strong, positive motivation towards the work.

Qualifications:

A Bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification Two years experience as an Interpreter.

To apply: please submit your CV to: Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation Human Resources, Fax: 011 339 6785, Or post to: P.O. Box 30778, Braamfontein, 2017, e-mail: ssingh@csvr.org.za

Deadline for applications: 26 October 2007. The CSVR reserves the right not to fill advertised positions. If you have not heard from us within 3 weeks of the closing date, you can assume that your application has been unsuccessful. Preference will be given to historically disadvantaged individuals. For further enquiries you can contact us at 011 403 5102/3 or 011 403 5650

Comments

We welcome any comments or feedback on the issues raised within this newsletter. If you have any comments about the format of the newsletter or issues you would like to see addressed, please contact us. If you would like to submit news to be considered for inclusion in the newsletter, please email us by Friday 26th October.

Thank you for reading and we look forward to hearing from you

Duncan Breen and Mpilo Shange-Buthane

Advocacy Officers

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