

CoRMSA NEWSLETTER

Edition 4 – 30th November 2007

News

Greenmarket Square

Greenmarket Square in central Cape Town is the site of a longstanding informal market largely catering towards tourism. There are currently a large number of non-national traders trading a variety of items such as curios in the Square alongside other stalls selling clothing, books and music. The City of Cape Town will be taking over the process of issuing permits from a private leaseholder from 1st December and a number of non-national traders have expressed concern that they will be discriminated against due to their documents not being recognised. CoRMSA contacted the City Councillor responsible for the takeover regarding the rights associated with refugee and asylum seeker documentation has been assured by the Executive Director of the responsible department that permits have been granted to non-nationals and no discrimination took place in the process. CoRMSA will work closely with our partner organisations to monitor the progress of this.

Operation Umbrella

CoRMSA was concerned to learn about the initiation of a campaign by the National Immigration Branch in the Western Cape to arrest 'illegal foreigners'. The operation, entitled Operation Umbrella, will take place throughout the province and target a variety of sites. CoRMSA is extremely disappointed in this development in light of the crisis at the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office which is currently unable to provide documents for a large proportion of those queuing outside each day. The net result of this is that those who are not served on any given day are then vulnerable to arrest and deportation.

CoRMSA would like to caution non-nationals to keep their documentation with them and maintain contact with the various service providers if they become aware of arrests. UCT Law Clinic has indicated that it will assist in securing the release of any non-nationals that may have an asylum claim and the Legal Resources Centre has also be instrumental in securing releases. Efforts are under way to record the names of those waiting outside the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office each day.

Cape Town

As a follow up to CoRMSA's request for the Office of the Mayor of the City of Cape Town and the Office of the Premier of the Western Cape to intervene in the current situation in Cape Town regarding access to documentation for asylum seekers and other issues, CoRMSA held fruitful discussions with both offices in Cape Town this week. Both offices have indicated key areas where co-operation with service providers could impact positively on the current situation. CoRMSA will be working with its partners to see how these issues can be taken further.

CoRMSA also attended the meetings of the Tutumike network and was pleased to learn of the initiatives being pursued by our partners. Further meetings were held with representatives of government and civil society and CoRMSA hopes to report on the outcome of these in the near future.

Durban

CoRMSA was pleased to attend a meeting of the Durban Refugee Service Providers Network on 15th November in Durban. As this was the final meeting for the year, it served as an evaluation session of the past year as well as planning objectives for the coming year. Outcomes included the scheduling of a strategic planning session early in the new year to identify ways to grow and strengthen the network.

Displaced Refugees in Delmas

CoRMSA and its partner organisations attended a community meeting in Delmas on 22nd November to find a way forward in resolving the issue of the displacement of the Somali and Ethiopian nationals. Organisations expressed their disappointment in the handling of the meeting and the continued absence of the mayor as the municipality employees stated that no resolutions could be made without his presence.

Key stakeholders such as community development workers and the ward councillors were also not present at the meeting. This was disappointing as their input into this process is highly valued. A follow-up meeting has been scheduled for 6th December where it is envisaged that representatives from different government departments will be present.

Durban Refugee Reception Office

CoRMSA held a meeting with the Acting Assistant Director of the Durban Refugee Reception Office in Durban on 15th November focusing on the operations of the office. Whilst acknowledging that there are issues that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency such as the system of making appointments for newcomers rather than issuing Section 22 permits on the same day, the office has taken some steps in addressing some of these. CoRMSA was also informed that the quality assurers have recently started their work at the Durban Refugee Reception Office and we look forward to the improvements this will bring to the services being provided.

Cape Town Refugee Reception Office

The Cape Town Refugee Reception Office has indicated that it will now be extending Section 22 permits for six months at a time thus reducing the need for asylum seekers to return to the office every three months or less. This is a welcome development that should impact favourably on both asylum seekers' livelihoods as well as the administrative backlog at the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office.

The Cape Town Refugee Reception Office has also appointed specific officials to deal with specific enquiries from the service providers. This is another welcome development which should serve to streamline enquiries on issues such as newcomer access to the office, changing details on documents, appeal enquiries and security-related issues. Tutumike members will keep us informed as to the success of this new measure.

Renewal of Asylum Seekers' Permits at Refugee Reception Offices

CoRMSA is disappointed to learn that some asylum seekers are still not aware that they can renew their Section 22 permits at **any** Refugee Reception Office. This means that individuals are bearing

unnecessary expenses in travelling to the cities where they first applied for asylum in order to renew their permits on a regular basis. Whilst previously asylum seekers were being told to report to the offices in the city where they first applied for asylum in order to renew their permits, this is no longer necessary. The DHA has confirmed that asylum seekers can renew their permits at any Refugee Reception Office and has communicated this with its staff. If anyone is told by a DHA official to report to another city to renew his or her permit and is unable to address this situation with another DHA official at the same office, they should report to one of the legal service providers such as UCT Law Clinic (Cape Town) or Lawyers for Human Rights (Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban).

Union of Refugee Women

The organisation was started in October 2001 by a group of refugee women with an aim of uplifting themselves after being faced by many challenges upon arriving in South Africa. Currently the organisation runs a crèche and pre-school for refugee and local children. Most of the children enrolled at the crèche are from poor backgrounds. The challenge is that sometimes parents are not able to pay school fees. This in turn has an impact on the work that the organisation is doing.

They also have a sewing group and are currently identifying markets where they can sell their goods. For more information about the organisation you can contact their office at: 031 332 6265 or Annociata at 0732003751 or Solange at 0799340941.

Eastern Cape Paralegal Training

CoRMSA will be holding its paralegal training for the Eastern Cape region in Grahamstown on 12th and 13th December. Representatives of organisations from across the province including Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown and East London as well as a number of smaller towns will be attending. CoRMSA welcomes the involvement of these organisations and looks forward to their contribution in ensuring the recognition and realisation of the rights of non-nationals.

Events

Black Sash Guide Launch

As part of its vision to “make human rights real”, the Black Sash has published a concise and easy-to-use guide that practically addresses issues of debt and credit – providing valuable information and guidance on the rights and responsibilities of both those who borrow and lend money. ***‘Debt and Credit: A reference guide for paralegals’*** is intended to assist paralegals and others – like priests, trade union representatives, social workers – who give advice to vulnerable people struggling to make ends meet. The guide draws extensively on the Black Sash’s practical experience in the field as well as the organisation’s active participation in the consultation process around the new National Credit Act, which came into effect in June this year. Copies of the guide will be distributed free of charge to non-profit organisations who wish to use it in the course of their work.

The launch takes place on 14th December at the Human Rights Building, 6th Floor, No 29 Princess of Wales Terrace (opposite Sunny Side Hotel), Parktown from 10.30 to 11.30. If you are interested in attending, please contact Thandiwe Zulu on 011- 834 8361 or email gaurd@blacksash.org.za to assist with arrangements for refreshments.

Counter-Xenophobia Training

The City of Joburg Migrant Helpdesk in partnership with CoRMSA, Lawyers for Human Rights and Dept of Home Affairs will conduct Counter-xenophobia training workshop for the CoJ Region C front-line staff 03 December 2007.

Stakeholders' Meeting on Safety and Security of Refugees

Islamic Relief will hold a stakeholders' meeting to discuss safety and security issues of refugees on 9th December 2007. For more information on this event contact Abdirahman-Ibrahim-Ateye at 011 836 1054.

Dialogue on Refugee Women

The Directorate of Refugee Affairs and the City of Johannesburg, will hold a dialogue with refugee women on 6th December 2007 from 09.30 to 1pm. The purpose of the function is to discuss the rights, responsibilities, challenges and difficulties that refugee women encounter in their dealings with government departments and in accessing City services. The venue is the City of Joburg Metro Centre (158 Loveday Street, Braamfontein Reception Room: Ground floor, Council Chamber Wing Block A). For more information on this event contact Thuli Mlangeni (City of Joburg Migrant 011 376 8670).

Word of thanks

The family of Mr Melusi Bafana who passed away on 10th November in police custody has asked that we extend their sincere gratitude to the people and organisations that offered assistance to them. Jesuit Refugee Services amongst others has contributed towards the costs of repatriating Mr Bafana's body to Zimbabwe. Organisations or individuals still willing to contribute to the costs, please contact Elliot Moyo of Mthwakazi Arts and Culture on 083 766 0020.

The Independent Claims Directorate has launched an investigation into Mr Bafana's death and the Office of the Gauteng MEC for Community Safety is monitoring the investigation at the request of CoRMSA.