



NEWS RELEASE

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CoRMSA expresses its dissatisfaction over the permanent closure of the only Refugee Reception Office in the Eastern Cape

JOHANNESBURG– The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has announced the closure of the only Refugee Reception Office (RRO) in Eastern Cape at the end of November under the pretext that “Port Elizabeth is not located strategically to assist people who want to apply for asylum”.

CoRMSA is deeply disturbed by the lack of planning and proper consultation with other stakeholders on the side of the DHA that seemingly does not have any contingency plan in place to assist applicants from the Port Elizabeth RRO. This RRO deals with applicants from the Free State, Northern Cape, Southern Cape and the Eastern Cape. It is inconceivable that poor refugees will have to travel to places that remain undisclosed to them up until this stage. But it appears that they will have to travel long distances to places such as Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria or Musina, at great personal cost, to have their permits extended or access other services.

Besides the economic hardships, this decision means that refugees will face serious administrative difficulties because of their files being relocated. And the transfer of files to other RROs will certainly overload those offices that are currently struggling to deal with their own backlogs. We also know that whenever Refugee Reception Offices are relocated many files are reported lost.

Refugee Reception Offices throughout the country are already under severe strain as a result of the closure of the Crown Mines Refugee Reception Office. Capacity problems will increase drastically if Port Elizabeth is to close down. This will place even more strain on an already inefficient asylum management system. It is also likely that this will result in human rights abuses as asylum seekers will be unable to access the RROs and will be forced to remain undocumented, leaving them vulnerable to arrest and deportation.

It is equally disturbing to note that no attempt has been made by the DHA to consult or notify other stakeholders in time or to publicise this closure at a broader level. This move will certainly disadvantage asylum seekers and refugees who will have to spend a

lot of money to get to the RROs where their files will be transferred to. Refugees and asylum seekers are also not always guaranteed to gain access to the office on the day they report because of long queues.

CORMSA thus calls upon the DHA to abandon its plans to close down the Port Elizabeth Refugee Reception Office, and to immediately resume processing new applications for asylum.

We also urge the DHA to communicate future decisions relating to asylum seeker and refugee management to civil society so that refugees and asylum seekers are not prejudiced as a result of a lack of information.

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