



Report of the Black Sash, CoRMSA and Oxfam Monitoring Team

De Doorns, Western Cape

The Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA), the Black Sash and Oxfam have put together a team of independent monitors to assess conditions in the temporary safety site as well as in areas outside the site that relate to the current displacement of Zimbabwean nationals in De Doorns. This monitoring team will collect information on conditions and processes at the safety site as well as on information from areas beyond the site so as to provide information that will be useful in developing ways to resolve the current displacement crisis. This information will be distributed to key role players and will also be published on the CoRMSA website.

25th November 2009

The vast majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs) staying at the safety site in De Doorns are Zimbabweans who have fled as a result of violence or concerns about their safety. It was reported on 23rd November that there were 6 Zambians, 2 Ghanaians and one Burundian staying at the site. One Zimbabwean was identified to be staying at the site as a matter of solidarity with countrymen, rather than for safety issues. A Zimbabwean national estimated the number to be +/- 1200 people on 23rd November.

As the first report in this series, there are extensive background notes on both South African and foreign national experiences of living and working in the De Doorns area, in so far as these issues are relevant to the current displacement of foreign nationals. These follow the monitoring report in respect of humanitarian assistance and the planning process.

MONITORING AT THE SAFETY SITE

1: SHELTER:

Monitors report that there are 3 tents, one of which currently is overcrowded as it accommodates about 150 people. Tents are not well ventilated and moisture accumulation is particularly a problem at night.

Women reported on 23 November that they were sleeping on the ground, without mattresses. Their blankets are wet, raising concerns about children's health risks. 1500 blankets, provided by ADRA SA, were distributed on 23rd November.

2: FOOD & NUTRITION:

Site residents are given two meals a day. However, there are complaints that the portions are insufficient, the quality poor and that the diet is monotonous and unbalanced. Meals are reported to often contain too much starch. There are no special diets for the sick and weak, nor any special provision for children. Children are getting food that is too spicy. Rationing of food, particularly bread, is identified as a problem by site residents. Mealtimes are irregular and residents have requested that the fresh food brought in by Sasko be given to them for lunch rather than stockpiled.

A shortage of food was reported on 23rd November. Apart from the obvious wellbeing concerns, this contributes a further security risk, particularly earlier in the week, when residents at the site were visiting town to buy food.

3: WATER & SANITATION

Monitors reported on 24th November that the water supply was sufficient and easily accessible for site residents. There were 10 taps and 6 showers. Conditions in the showers had improved.

Separate toilets are provided for males and females. Safety site residents interviewed complained about the lack of clean toilets. Although the toilets are drained they are not always properly cleaned by the municipal workers. Some site residents complained that not all toilets were drained every day and others that sanitary towels are being disposed of in the toilets. Dissatisfaction with the conditions of the toilet means that some site residents are opting rather to use the bush system.

Bins and toilets were observed, on 23rd November, not to have been emptied for two days.

4: PROVISION OF SPECIAL ASSISTANCE for the MOST VULNERABLE:

There are concerns about shortages of baby food and formula. As a result, babies are swapped among women in order to access additional baby food and formula.

There are some IDPs on ARVs and TB medication and they are not getting the necessary balanced diet.

5: HEALTH CARE

It was reported that a 6 month pregnant women was hospitalised on 17th November following the onset of premature labour. One Zimbabwean woman was reported to be in hospital following the attack on her house by people armed with knives. Only one person at the safety site, a male, has been identified as the victim of a violent attack.

Children at the site have been affected by insect bites and there is no protection available for this. Mothers of babies expressed concern that conditions at the site left their children vulnerable to TB or other illnesses.

There are no emergency first aid kits and no equipment to record blood pressure.

TB patients report that they do not have sufficient food to support their medication regime.

6: UNACCOMPANIED MINORS & SEPARATED CHILDREN

No report available.

7: INFORMATION PROVISION TO THE DISPLACED

It is reported that camp residents are requesting information on a number of issues, namely:

Compensation: Women asked for information regarding what assistance they would get to replace looted possessions. Residents want to know when the police will be returning to the site to follow up on efforts to return lost and stolen property.

Duration of assistance: Women were also asking, on 23rd November, how long they would 'have to' stay in the camp and how soon could they return to work. There is a persistent question relating to how long the safety site is likely to exist.

DHA assistance: Information is also requested by site residents as to the return date of DHA to assist with documentation, in accordance with an undertaking given last week. The DHA promised to help those people (estimated to be 250) who lost their documentation during the displacement, either with transport to the Maitland office or to do it in De Doorns.

8: SECURITY PROVISION AT DISPLACEMENT SITES

Relations between IDPs at the safety site were reported as generally satisfactory on 23rd November, with apparently equitable distribution mechanisms in evidence. However, some concerns were raised about underlying tensions between Shona- and Ndebele-speaking Zimbabweans.

Sleeping arrangements, with men, women, children and babies all sleeping together, are culturally inappropriate and represent a security risk for women and children. There is a lack of privacy for married couples.

There are concerns regarding the fact that IDPs, particularly males, are body searched on entry to the site when returning from work.

Women at the site expressed ongoing fears of violence on 23rd November.

9: ACCESS to JUSTICE for VICTIMS who HAVE LAID CHARGES

Alleged perpetrators of attacks were reportedly arrested on 20th, 21st and 23rd November. It was reported on 23rd November that the 24 arrested had appeared in court on charges of public violence and that the hearing was postponed until 30 November for further investigations to take place. The arrested were transferred to Worcester prison that afternoon. One of the 24 arrested, a minor, was subsequently released. Additional charges, including theft and damage to property charges, are being investigated in respect of the 23 remaining detainees.

It was reported that, in addition, two shops, run by Congolese and Cameroonian nationals, had been closed. Although initial reports suggested that they had been looted, it was subsequently established that the shop owners had closed their shops temporarily as they were concerned about their safety. The shops were open by 24th November.

11: INCLUSION OF DISPLACED in PLANNING PROCESSES:

An IDP Representative Committee has been convened.

12: PROTECTION PLANNING of the SITE:

No report available.

13: NON FOOD ITEMS:

Some shortage of clothing was reported.

With regard to toiletries and sanitary products, only women receive toilet paper. Women also receive 2/3 sanitary towels and 3 nappies for babies.

14: REINTEGRATION

Monitors attended the Reintegration Committee meeting on 23rd November, along with representatives from UNHCR, COSATU, SAHRC, the Breede River Municipality, SAPS POPS (Public Order Police Service), church leaders, Community Police Forum leaders and two IDP Committee Representatives. SAHRC are facilitating the reintegration program and have emphasised their commitment to ensuring that this process should not be captured by political interests.

On 23rd November a group of Zimbabwean women said they have already forgiven the South Africans as a precursor to reintegration. Some women stated that their main concern was the welfare of their families rather than dwelling on what had already happened. It should be noted that some site residents feel pressure to reconcile in order to take advantage of the seasonal nature of work.

There are unsubstantiated claims that 20% of the Zimbabweans at the safety site would like to be repatriated, provided that transport is available to their home town. A few individuals appear to be independently organising their departure from the site for return to Zimbabwe.

IDPs report feeling that police had not responded with necessary speed when the violence broke out. Some of the site residents interviewed said that they were scared that elements within the police would not protect them on their return back to the communities as they had not, they felt, done so when the evictions took place. In contrast, they reported that there were elements of the SAPS who had provided the community with a degree of protection when there were threats of evictions two weeks prior to the latest events.

Contacts have been made with farmer representatives and some labour brokers (known locally as 'spanners'). Enthusiasm has been expressed for information sharing with Black Sash and the SAHRC.

15: LIVELIHOOD MAINTENANCE:

Some IDPs are being transported to and from farms from the site on a daily basis, which is creating tension in the town.

Monitors were alerted to a group of foreign nationals being housed in a building on a farm in Touws Rivier in apparently less than adequate conditions. Monitors visited the site but were denied access. The SAHRC will follow up as it is illegal to deny access to SAHRC monitors.

16: SCHOOLING:

Children are reportedly transported to a local school from the safety site, with guarantees of their safety. Social workers from the Department of Social Development (DSD) have expressed concern about levels of traumatization among some of the children. By 24th November DSD and UNICEF had started play activities for children inside the safety site. Some mothers are able to take advantage of crèche facilities at the farms where they work.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- At least two persons currently at the security site should be trained as monitors.
- The needs of vulnerable women, particularly single young women and those with young babies, require particular attention.
- Increase and promote representation of women in forums related to this crisis.
- Promote the safety of women. Rape Crisis or Trauma Centre should be requested to establish mechanisms to facilitate access to necessary services.
- A duty roster should be created for site residents to clean the toilets themselves.
- Women resident at the site should be encouraged to assist in preparing and making of meals.
- Consideration should be given to providing lunch for site residents.
- The special dietary needs of the sick should be accommodated.
- Women have requested that their sleeping quarters be separated from those of men—if not in a separate tent, at least by a dividing screen in the tent.
- There is a need to complete identification of IDPs who were actually displaced to avoid influx of people from other towns seeking to take advantage of site provisions.

MONITORING OUTSIDE THE SAFETY SITE

South African Perspectives

Historically, many of the South African residents of the De Doorns townships were themselves displaced from their homes on the farms in the early 1990s. A prominent resident explained how these memories, combined with widespread hunger and need, created part of the background to the current sentiments in the community. Monitors report that in Stofland, socio-economic conditions are very bad, with up to 10 shacks (60 to 80 people) sharing a single toilet.

The complex seasonal cycles and phases of harvesting in the local agricultural industry play a major role in affecting local community income flows. The closing of the schools at the end of November coincides with the beginning of “uitknip” (cutting out) on the farms. Traditionally, the children of farm workers (seemingly as young as 12 years old) have worked alongside their parents for the duration of the holidays. The presence of Zimbabwean labour is felt by local farm workers to present a threat to this significant annual boost to family income.

A protest march and a community meeting took place on 23 November. Monitors reported a pervasive sense of betrayal of the community around failure of councillors to fulfil promises, especially in relation to housing.

More specifically, issues raised by speakers at these events included:

- South Africans report that they are fighting for their rights to housing and to work.
- There was great anger that community leaders have been arrested and sent to Worcester prison.

- Concerns were expressed that this turn of events exposed the leaders to potential human rights abuses and that they were therefore being further punished.
- The view was expressed that since no physical attacks were made on foreign nationals, the leaders were being unduly harshly treated.
- The displacement of foreign nationals on Tuesday was viewed as justifiable eviction from property that belonged to community members rather than a criminal act.
- Questions were raised as to the identity of 'spies' in the community who had given the names to police of the people subsequently arrested.

Dissatisfaction was expressed in relation to claims that:

- Sotho people living in Maseru township had not shown their solidarity by joining the meeting.
- Some South Africans had gone to work on the farms that morning rather than attend the meeting.
- Zimbabweans still occupied certain rented accommodation in the township.
- Friendships and love relationships existed between certain Zimbabweans and local South Africans.
- Political affiliation rather than community membership was driving some aspects of the community dialogue around the conflict.
- Political actors appeared to be more concerned about the plight of Zimbabweans than that of South African citizens.
- Councillors are to blame for the fact that, when xenophobic violence broke out in Worcester in 2008, they accepted fleeing Zimbabweans into the De Doorns communities.
- Some Zimbabweans have purchased plots in the townships but relatives of the vendors of these plots claim that the sales are not valid as they were 'too cheap'. It is claimed that the land in question should therefore be returned to the original South African owners.

A number of threats to destroy the property of offending parties were made and a discussion on the levels of unity in the community ensued. It should be noted that there were individuals who spoke out against the attacks on foreign nationals.

It was requested that the community should:

- Be permitted to hold another march on 30th November, the day of the bail hearing for the arrested group.
- Send a delegation to negotiate with SAPS with respect to the transfer of the 24 arrested persons to Worcester prison.
- Rally to increase their collection of money for the bail hearing on 30th November.

Several local commentators claimed that the recent extension of DHA services in Worcester to serve the Section 22 permit needs of Zimbabweans in the area had increased tensions in so far as it attracted more Zimbabweans to the area. It is also reported to have created tensions between Zimbabweans and other foreign nationals, notably Somalians, who were not being served.

A generalised lack of unity and sense of insecurity were evident. For example, monitors received reports from Afrikaans-speaking women whose working hours had been shortened in response to threats by locals who had banned people going to work on the farms. These women were concerned about the welfare of their families and their own safety while, at the same time, also sympathising with women and children who had been displaced to the safety site.

Zimbabwean Perspectives

Zimbabwean women reported having better relationships with Afrikaans speaking colleagues than with Xhosa or Sotho speaking colleagues. It was emphasised that Afrikaans-speaking women were not involved in the violence.

With respect to farm work, Zimbabweans complain that they are unable to access work as individuals due to the labour broking system. There are Zimbabweans and locals amongst the labour brokers. Certain farms are reported to employ only Zimbabweans or only Zimbabweans and coloured workers.

Zimbabweans claim that it is not true that they are underpaid and that labour brokers do not distinguish between Zimbabweans, and Xhosa or Afrikaans speaking labourers. They claimed that farmers preferred to employ Afrikaans-speaking and Zimbabwean workers. They insisted that remuneration is transparent and that they are not underpaid. However, they observed that since the arrival of Zimbabweans, farmers had not increased their remuneration on a seasonal basis.

In contrast, a group of IDP farm workers reported how they had been promised R65 per day and good working conditions. Instead they were paid R54 per day and housed in over-crowded accommodation without privacy.

Monitors report that conditions of work amongst farm workers are bad. The workers work an 11 hour day. Some have a one hour break for lunch and some another 15 minute break. From 1st December the payment structure changes to a piecework basis, according to the number of trees picked. This makes it difficult for anyone to rest as they fear going home without any pay if they do not meet their target for the day.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A monitoring team should ensure the human rights are upheld for the alleged perpetrators that are awaiting trial at Worcester Prison for public violence.
- The roll-out of the plans to observe and train monitors in the communities needs to be sensitive to the changing local community dynamics. Training has commenced with local faith based leaders and community police forum members, pending further training when the situation in De Doorns has stabilized.
- Local farming activities are diverse. Consideration needs to be given to engaging with a broader range of farmer representatives.
- Engagement with local government leaders should actively continue to have a better understanding of their challenges.
- Further investigate child labour practice in the area with a view to understanding how this impacts on reconciliation initiatives.
- Follow up regarding allegations of a police raid to check documentation in Stofland in February 2009

This briefing report was compiled by Vicki Igglesden from reports dated Monday 23rd November and Tuesday 24th November 2009. The monitoring reports are compiled by a team of independent monitors and do not necessarily reflect the view of CoRMSA, the Black Sash or Oxfam.