



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.

Report 10

17th June 2010

INTRODUCTION

During the period of 30th May to 1st June 2010, the Black Sash visited De Doorns to monitor the closure of the displaced persons camp, the intended date of which was 31st May 2010. However, due to legal intervention by the Legal Resources Centre, the camp did not close on the said date. Therefore, during this visit the monitors spoke with government officials, displaced persons and South African local residents in order to understand what the situation was, and what would be happening in the following days and weeks. The government officials were frustrated that the camp could not be closed on 31st May. They were continuing to offer transport out of the town, and intended to seek legal advice so that an eviction order could be obtained. The Zimbabweans on the camp were not willing to leave until they received compensation, and – despite the availability of starter packs for rebuilding shelter – they were scared of moving back to the townships for fear of a backlash by South African residents. The South African residents representatives remain committed to receiving better service delivery before the Zimbabweans will be welcomed back into the townships.

CONDITIONS AT THE DISPLACEMENT SITE PRIOR TO 31ST MAY 2010

The Reintegration Committee re-registered everyone at the camp and issued them with identity cards. 360 were registered. Transport was still being made available to take the displaced persons back to Zimbabwe or elsewhere in South Africa. Over the weekend of 29th-30th May, 60 people indicated that they wanted to leave (43 to Zimbabwe, 17 to Johannesburg). The representatives from the Reintegration Committee asked these people to sign to affirm their desire to be transported, then resign the following day. This was to avoid any accusations of forcible removal by the government.

The services on the camp have been reduced in tandem with the decreasing number of people at the camp. A number of toilets have been collected, two taps have been removed and refuse is not being collected as frequently. The displaced persons on the site complained that it was the broken toilets that had been left, and that consequently people on the camp preferred to use the bushes.

The harsh weather conditions at the camp are also making life uncomfortable. The temperature has dropped in recent weeks, particularly in the evening. Furthermore, substantial rainfall in the area had made the camp wet and muddy. There are still a number of babies and small children at the camp, whose health may be suffering due to their exposure to the winter elements.

31st MAY 2010

The camp did not close on 31st May as had been intended by the Reintegration Committee. The monitors learned that the Legal Resource Centre and PASSOP had filed a legal intervention saying that no person could be forcibly removed from the camp without an eviction order. The Black Sash after discussions with CoRMSA also sent a letter to key stakeholders on 27th May 2010 registering its concerns around the intended closure and requesting due legal process to be followed in the closure of the site. Consequently, Dr Hildegard Fast, who is involved in the Reintegration Committee, circulated a letter on 28th May instructing officials that nobody could be evicted from the camp on 31st May if they refused to leave voluntarily.

THE NEXT STEP

Following the failure to officially close the camp on 31st May, the Reintegration Committee convened and decided to continue with a range of measures to deal with the issue. According to a representative of the committee, the site was effectively closed on 31st May 2010, but will continue to provide services until the camp has emptied. These services will be reduced in proportion to the number of people on the site. To ensure that no additional persons join the camp, security measures have been tightened and only those who have been registered by the UNHCR, Home Affairs or the Breede Valley municipality will be able to access the camp.

The municipality will continue to assist anybody who wishes to be transported back to Zimbabwe or to any other part of South Africa. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has returned to the site to process the Zimbabweans currently wishing to be repatriated. This group of 43 is to be transported on Sunday 6th June, and a following group of 66 is to leave for Zimbabwe on 13th June. A further 65 have been offered employment opportunities on citrus farms in Kirkwood, Eastern Cape.

The municipality is also seeking urgent legal advice so that an eviction order can be obtained from the High Court in Cape Town. This will allow the government to remove anyone who refuses to leave the camp voluntarily.

COMPENSATION

The demand for compensation has been a recurrent theme during the monitoring trips over the past three months. During the last visit, the monitors learned that a number of those at the camp were committed to remaining on the site until they were awarded compensation. They reported that they had been advised by an NGO that they were entitled to compensation. However, the reintegration team has remained firm on the policy that no compensation will be granted under any circumstances.

REINTEGRATION

In addition to transporting the Zimbabweans away from De Doorns, the committee is also continuing in its attempt to reintegrate the Zimbabweans back into the De Doorns townships. However, the reintegration process is not progressing smoothly.

In a practical sense, reintegration plans have advanced. Government officials have engaged with township landlords to identify those who are willing to rent out backyards or rooms to displaced persons. In addition to this, starter packs – which contain material with which to rebuild shelter – are available to anybody who desires one.

However, only one Zimbabwean has returned to one of the area's townships so far. The said person shared the cost of a shed with his employer, found a backyard area in Hassie Square that he could rent, and subsequently built his shelter upon it. Government officials aided with the movement of his belongings from the camp to Hassie Square. The Zimbabwean moved on 26th May, and had not experienced any problems or hostility since the move. Although this may indicate that the displaced persons can be reintegrated without any unrest, the person who had successfully moved cautioned that his situation may be atypical because, unlike many persons left on the site, he already had good relations with his landlord and neighbours, so he felt safe living in the township again.

Despite this positive example, the Zimbabweans interviewed on the site still felt threatened by the South Africans in the townships, and were consequently opposed to moving back. Those spoken to were aware that service delivery was the driving force behind the South Africans' discontent. The Zimbabweans were concerned that, if they were to be given land on which to rebuild shelter, the South Africans would be frustrated because they too are demanding more land from the municipality. Additionally, the Zimbabweans did not want to be clustered together in one area in the townships, because they would feel more vulnerable to attack. The Zimbabweans also did not want to stay on the camp, but felt they had no choice because they were still unwelcome in the townships.

The feelings of unhappiness over land allocation was confirmed when the monitors met with South African local residents. Once again, the residents' leaders firmly believed that South Africans in De Doorns should receive land and adequate service delivery before the Zimbabweans would be allowed to return. The residents were upset by the perception that those who had been born in De Doorns or lived in the area for many years and were still without land of their own could be sidelined so that the Zimbabweans could be re-housed.

Government officials held a meeting with the South African residents on Thursday 27th May to discuss reintegration plans with them. However, the meeting was poorly attended, with a turnout of only around 50 or 60. The wet weather may have been a deterrent, as many would have had to walk to the venue. Due to the small attendance, those present felt they were not sufficiently representative to speak on behalf of the whole community. According to the attendees, the meeting ended bitterly and a resolution was not found.

Additionally, the South African residents were also displeased by the way in which local government was communicating with them. Firstly, they felt that the municipality dictated to them, instead of discussing and including them in reintegration plans. Secondly, according to the residents' leaders, the government representatives did not widely disseminate information indicating that meetings would be taking place. They were only announced in a handful of streets, and this was only done one or two hours before the meetings were due to occur. Consequently, this made it difficult to ensure a high turnout.

Furthermore, issues surrounding the Danger Zone are continuing to fuel friction. As illustrated in the previous report, the residents in the Danger Zone began moving their shacks to the site adjacent to Stofland at the beginning of May. This caused frustration among many other De Doorns locals who felt they deserved priority. This frustration has been heightened as more people have now moved into the empty spaces left in the Danger Zone. The locals believed that these new people would once again get the priority for new land, due to the hazardous location of their shacks. It appeared that there was no monitoring or measures put in place to prevent the erection of more shacks in the Danger Zone.

Besides the demand for space and service deliver, another factor adding tension to the situation is the ongoing case against those charged with public violence during the unrest at the end of November. The South African community members emphasized that this was still an emotional issue, and had the potential to cause friction if the case was not resolved by the time the Zimbabweans returned to the townships.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

While the immediate need to repatriate, reintegrate or transport the current displaced persons and close the site remains the foremost priority, the question over long-term relations and the maintenance of permanent peace still lingers in the background. The closure of the camp – if and when it is achieved – does not mean the root problems in De Doorns have been solved. Already, it seems as though the town will experience another influx of foreign nationals at the beginning of the new grape season in September. A number of the Zimbabweans who had opted for voluntary repatriation intended to return to De Doorns for employment in September. They believed that many more would also be returning to the area in two or three months' time. One of the interviewees said he would only be returning to Zimbabwe for two weeks to visit family and friends, then he would return to the area to look for work.

This means that the potential for a new wave of unrest is on the horizon, even before the current problem has been solved. Consequently, measures which can address the issues in De Doorns at their core should be developed. One suggestion was to introduce civic education. The government officials interviewed during the visit spoke of the need for more training and education on civic rights and responsibilities within the community. They recommended that community education should be started immediately, covering such themes as local government, local economics and co-operative development. In doing so, the officials suggested that this would help re-nurture relationships in the area, thus lessening the potential for discontent and unrest.

Two criticisms highlighted by residents should be borne in mind if such education programmes are to take place. Firstly, when talking about workshops run in the area by an NGO, the local residents said that they did not fully understand the language being used, which made it difficult for them to comprehend the overall concepts and themes being taught. Thus, for education workshops to be successful, the language used should be straightforward and accessible. Secondly, some residents said they often felt dictated to, rather than being fully involved in meetings or workshops. This means that workshops must also be inclusive and discussion-based, rather than being perceived as one-way education sessions.

CONCLUSION

The Reintegration Committee is keen to close the camp as soon as possible. Transportation, repatriation and reintegration are all currently available to the displaced persons on the site. However, there are a number of persons on the camp who are not taking up these options. Many are

committed to staying on the camp until they receive compensation. Others do not want to reintegrate for fear of backlash from the community. As the government is seeking to obtain an eviction order, it is likely that those continuing to stay on the camp will eventually be forcibly removed. Many South African residents still seem hostile to reintegration before basic services have been delivered and land is made available to locals. This, coupled with the tension over the ongoing court case, means that there is still the potential for more unrest if the displaced persons return to the townships in the near future. This potential could be heightened if a substantial number of Zimbabweans return to the area at the beginning of the coming season. Once again, it is clear that the long term problems in De Doorns – i.e. those relating to service delivery and land availability – need to be addressed if peace is to be maintained permanently.

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.