



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.

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INTRODUCTION

The Black Sash returned to De Doorns from June 29th to 30th June 2010 to monitor how the situation in the area had developed since the last monitoring visit at the end of May. During this visit, the monitors met with displaced persons, South African local residents and government officials to assess how the circumstances had developed over the course of the month. However, it appears that very little has changed since the end of May. There are still a number of displaced persons living on the sports field, and the government is still trying to remove all those remaining through repatriation, relocation or reintegration. However, many are not taking up these options, so it seems unlikely that the camp can be closed in the near future. South African residents are still distressed about the lack of service delivery, and continue to voice their opposition to the reintegration of the displaced persons before this has been addressed.

SITUATION AT THE DISPLACEMENT SITE

According to government representatives, there are currently between 240 and 280 displaced persons left in the camp. There are ninety tents still standing, although not all are fully occupied. The municipality is not able to condense the remaining persons and take down the empty tents, because moving them without consent is technically seen as being an act of eviction.

Basic Services

Basic services are still available in the camp, but have been reduced in proportion to the number of persons still living there. According to one of the displaced persons interviewed, there are still an adequate number of toilets and these are cleaned regularly. However, he mentioned that refuse removal was not as frequent as before, and consequently the bins were sometimes overflowing.

Health

The government officials expressed a grave concern for the conditions of health in the camp. Already, there are indications that the site is causing serious health problems. Firstly, one of the security guards who had been working in the camp for a number of months had recently been hospitalized with German measles and pneumonia. Furthermore, government representatives who have been working closely on the site have been suffering from respiratory problems.

One of the government representatives identified the drainage system stemming from the taps and showers as a source of potential health problems. Consequently, the officials proposed two major steps to take in order to combat the dangers posed. Firstly, they suggested that medical screening should take place in the camp to identify any dangerous or contagious health issues that may be developing among the displaced persons. Assistance with screening from a medical body would be necessary to do this. In addition, the clinic in De Doorns has been identified as a willing partner in this operation. Secondly, they recognised that an environmental impact assessment was necessary to highlight any further threats to health on the site. The representatives were also concerned that that, as the camp is not isolated from the town, an outbreak of illness among the displaced persons could have a huge impact on both the site and in the surrounding areas in De Doorns. In short, the government officials were deeply concerned that serious health problems could develop, and thus were keen to close the camp as soon as possible.

Additional Aid

According to the government representatives, the displaced persons do not qualify to receive food aid under the mandate of the Department of Social Development. The Department does offer food security in certain situations, such as displacement due to flooding or fires and when one qualifies for the Social Relief of Distress benefit. However, the officials pointed out that the displaced persons in De Doorns do not qualify for food aid because their current state of unemployment is a natural situation in seasonal work. Additionally, the provision of food in the camp would likely do more to anger the South African residents, many of whom are also currently out of work due to the seasonal cycle.

For the same reason, there will be no blankets provided to those in the camp. Although the weather is worsening, the officials did not want to stoke further anger among De Doorns residents by supplying additional assistance on the site. Furthermore, the government representatives felt that the displaced persons had their own means of providing basic needs, so could purchase their own blankets if they were required.

Camp Closure

The government is still offering three options to move people off the camp: repatriation, relocation and reintegration.

Repatriation

The government still has a commitment from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to assist with transport back to Zimbabwe. This involves organising transfers from De Doorns to Worcester, Worcester to Johannesburg, Johannesburg to Beitbridge and then on to anywhere in Zimbabwe. In addition to these logistics, the IOM has also been arranging a health official to carry out medical screenings before the persons leave. To avoid accusations of forced removal, those who wish to be repatriated must approach a government official voluntarily and write in their own words

that they wish to leave. The last repatriation was a group of 63 who were moved early in the month of June. The government officials complimented the Breede Valley Municipality for making the transport and manpower available to help organise these operations.

Relocation

The government is also still committed to offering relocation to areas elsewhere in South Africa. However, the officials are now approaching this option with caution. This is due to an incident when transport was organized for a number of the displaced persons, who then decided to stay in the camp in the hope of receiving compensation.

Reintegration

The government representatives said that they had been focusing more on repatriation and relocation, because reintegration was a complex and somewhat hazardous option. Still, the government is continuing to liaise with landlords to find areas where those on the site could move back to. However, one of the displaced persons interviewed on the site believed that the municipality was not interested in reintegration and felt that they were not doing enough to organise meetings between the De Doorns residents and the people in the camp.

A collection of displaced persons have reintegrated so far, with no problems reported. The monitors met with one of those who previously lived in the camp, and now lives in farm housing. He is the only foreign national living in the area, but has so far not encountered any problems from his South African neighbours and did not think there was any danger of backlash or hostility.

A new approach?

The government officials believed that a new approach was necessary in order to encourage the displaced persons to leave the camp. Although there are three options available for moving elsewhere, they believed the remaining people were still waiting for compensation. In order to develop a new strategy, the government intended to send a delegation to the IOM to discuss how together they can approach the situation differently. One of the officials emphasised that it was necessary to deal with the displaced persons as individuals rather than as a group, in order to ascertain exactly what each person wanted to do. They also suggested bringing in conflict resolution professionals to mediate this dialogue, and to encourage them to take up one of the three options for leaving the camp.

While this is ongoing, the option of obtaining an eviction order has been put on hold. This is because the government officials want to try and manage relations peacefully, rather than forcibly removing the displaced persons. However, officials told monitors that should progress not be made, they believe this option will have to be called upon as a last resort.

SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

In addition to visiting the site, the monitors returned to Stofland to speak with South African representatives from the De Doorns area. The grievances that were voiced during this meeting were the same as previous visits.

Once again, the residents' representatives demanded service delivery in the townships before they would allow the displaced persons to be reintegrated. A major point of discontent continues to be the lack of housing. The residents' representatives repeated their dissatisfaction at having to move

their shacks to a new site, rather than moving to a permanent house. They were also frustrated that there continued to be a lack of electricity in some areas in the townships. According to one of the representatives, discontent was not only caused due to issues of physical housing and electricity, but also due to a lack of information and transparency from the government regarding when and where service delivery projects would be taking place. He believed that more communication from the government might assuage frustrations within the residents.

The residents' representative also did not believe it was possible for the displaced persons to return to the townships simply because there was nowhere to house them. According to one resident, many of the displaced persons could not return to where they had previously been renting from, because many of these accommodations were on municipal land. As it is illegal to rent municipal land for one's own income, the residents' representative did not think there would be many other spaces for the displaced persons in which to live. He was of the opinion that, in encouraging the displaced persons to return to their previous landlords, the government was looking for a short-term solution to clear the sports field, rather than developing a long-term plan to address the housing situation.

The ongoing case against those charged in the unrest at the end of last year is another difficulty in achieving the successful reintegration of the displaced persons. According to the residents' representative, this is still a source of tension and has the potential to cause hostility. Furthermore, the anxiety over the case has been heightened due to its rising costs, for which some residents have been raising money. They have already spent around R22,000 and need to raise another R12,000 to pay the lawyer to continue with the case.

CONCLUSION

There have been very few positive developments since the last visit at the end of May. Although the number in the camp has reduced, there is a sizeable number still living there. Furthermore, although basic services are still available, the weather is worsening and the potential for serious health problems is real. The government is taking steps to tackle health issues in the camp, and is continuing to try and reduce the number on the site by offering repatriation, relocation and reintegration. Efforts to facilitate reintegration appear to be inadequate. Still, the government has also recognised that a new approach is necessary in order to encourage the remaining persons to leave the camp. Many residents of De Doorns remain unhappy about service delivery, and are continuing to demand better services before reintegration. Additionally, the lack of housing space and tensions over the court case pose further problems to achieving reintegration. In sum, the winter weather and health problems in the camp underscore the necessity to close the site as soon as possible. However, there remain a number of hurdles to overcome before this can happen.

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.