



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 on 20th May 2010. This visit was arranged quickly in response to the rapidly changing circumstances on the camp since the last visit at the end of April. During this previous trip to the area, the monitors learned that the municipality and province were working together in a newly-established Reintegration Committee, and that a target date for reintegration had been set for 31st May. However, the monitors also discovered that the number of people at the camp was not dropping quickly, due to more Zimbabweans arriving from elsewhere in South Africa. Moreover, there was found to be a lack of clarity over where the Zimbabweans would physically live upon their reintegration. The situation has changed markedly in the past two weeks: the number at the camp has plummeted (and continues to fall daily) and a number of Zimbabweans have already moved back into the townships. During the day trip on 20th May, the monitors found that the camp had indeed reduced in size, that buses were being provided to transport the Zimbabweans back to their home country or to elsewhere in South Africa, and that plans to reintegrate the remaining displaced persons were being formulated. Despite these positive signs, however, there still remains a lack of awareness among the displaced persons on the camp regarding where they will go once the site closes at the end of May. Moreover, many of the Zimbabweans feel a sense of uncertainty of what the reception will be from the South Africans once they are reintegrated.

SITUATION AT THE CAMP

The number at the camp has dropped substantially since the end of April. Officials from the Office of the Premier advised that their current number of IDPs at the site was 518, however this number was not confirmed hence they decided to do a head count that evening. The monitors observed several patches on the sports field where empty tents had been removed. Officials on the site confirmed that a total 45 tents had been taken down so far. During the last visit, the monitors learned that, although many of the original displaced persons living at the camp had left, other unemployed Zimbabweans

coming from elsewhere in South Africa had sustained the overall number. This is no longer the case, as a large proportion of the displaced persons living on the camp have been transported back to Zimbabwe, or have been taken to other areas in South Africa in search of employment, primarily to Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Ceres. The citrus industry has been the main form of employment absorbing the displaced Zimbabweans. One of the persons living on the site estimated that, of those who had left, one quarter had gone back to Zimbabwe, and the remaining three quarters had gone elsewhere in South Africa to look for work.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has made a significant contribution towards helping reduce the quantity on the camp. The IOM carried out a count of the number of people who wanted to go back to Zimbabwe and began arranging transport accordingly. Buses moving people to Zimbabwe and elsewhere in South Africa began running on 16th May. The IOM has provided funding towards transportation, but the Premier's Office and local government are also paying for the movement. On the day of the visit, the monitors witnessed a truck collecting luggage to take to Zimbabwe. The luggage was being transported separately because there was not enough space on buses when they left Sunday, so those who left on that day were without the bulk of their luggage for at least five days. Each traveller was allowed to transport 30kg on the bus with them.

There were differences in the numbers of people who registered to leave and those who left, i.e. 41 persons registered to go to Zimbabwe while only 31 left. This meant that additional resources had to be made available for the remaining 10 and anyone else who decided to change their minds along the way. It was decided that the Provincial and local government would cover the costs for the remaining persons who wanted to return to Zimbabwe and to other parts of South Africa. Those wanting to return to Zimbabwe would be transported to the Beitbridge border post, where the IOM would ensure people are transported to their homes or areas close to home. 65 persons registered to go to Johannesburg and 31 to go to Port Elizabeth. The Premier's Office confirms that 23 registered to go back into the area in De Doorns where they came from.

The cost of the transport provided by the Province and local government on 20th May was R130,000. Because of the huge cost involved, a Provincial Government official indicated that the Provincial Government was very disappointed that not all of those who registered to be transported showed up for the transport. He attributed this change of mind to the rumours about the possibility of compensation payouts, which is reportedly being spread by a group of individuals in the site. The official suggested that this group was causing 'demobilisation' in the site, resulting in increased costs for the reintegration process.

According to the displaced persons interviewed on the day, the vast majority of the people who are still at the camp are the ones who have been there since it was established at the end of November 2009. This illustrates that the new Zimbabweans who arrived throughout April moved on quickly once transport was provided. Those left at the site also said that it is mostly couples or families who are left at the camp, and that it is mainly single people who have moved on.

It seems to be the case that hopes for a compensation payout once the camp closes are keeping the displaced persons on the site. Although the government will not be giving compensation, there were reports that an organisation has been near the site, telling the Zimbabweans that they have the right to compensation. Consequently, a small collection of around thirty camp residents is planning to stay until they have received compensation. On the day of the monitoring visit, 31 people were supposed to be transported to Port Elizabeth. However, 30 decided to stay because they had heard rumours of compensation becoming available. Although the government has already decided that no compensation will be given, many of the displaced persons interviewed on the day were not aware that there would be categorically no payout from the government. If the demand for compensation

before movement becomes stronger, the government may have no option but to forcibly remove them on 31st May.

According to the Office of the Premier, the site have to be closed for many reasons; the sports associations want their field back in the condition they first got it, the financial and human resource implications of maintaining the site are enormous and the site has reportedly become a breeding ground for illegal shebeens and drugs.

REINTEGRATION

In addition to organising transport away from the area, government officials have also been setting up the process for the reintegration of the remaining Zimbabweans into the townships. While only 23 of the displaced persons expressed the desire to return to the areas where they were removed from, a large number remains undecided. Provincial Government officials are confident that everyone remaining after the busses have gone will be reintegrated into the local areas and there were indications that some South Africans would be willing to help them return as they would see the Zimbabwean nationals providing a source of income in the form of rent. A Provincial Government official was quoted to have said: “when we close on 31 May, everyone must be out, whether they want to be or not.”

The government representatives are liaising with landlords in the townships to see if there is space they are willing to rent out to Zimbabweans, and facilitating communication between the Zimbabweans and potential and existing landlords. They facilitate this communication both on request from the displaced persons as well randomly in order to smooth the reintegration process. The message communicated by the local and provincial government through these negotiations is as follows:

- They are not entering service delivery discussions, they only have the mandate to reintegrate;
- The municipality is the agent dealing with service delivery, those issues must be taken up with them;
- There is no guarantee for the safety of foreign nationals if there is not the same guarantee for South Africans;
- The November event was criminal and will be dealt with as such;
- No financial payouts will be provided to foreign nationals by UNHCR. This has been decided by the UNHCR on the basis that the foreign nationals displaced by the November incidents were not refugees.

On the day of the visit, the monitors spoke with one of the Zimbabwean committee leaders who had found a space to live in Hassie Square. He was pleased to have found somewhere to live, because the prospect of the camp closing and the impending winter had caused much stress about the future. The committee leader said that, although there were still concerns regarding the starter packs (see below), the government officials had been of great help during the past few weeks considering the size of their task.

The provincial and local government are going to be providing starter packs containing materials with which to erect new shelters in the townships. The Zimbabweans are aware of the availability of these starter packs. However, nobody has yet been issued with one, and those interviewed on the day were unaware of who would be entitled to one. Some believed that they would only be given to those who can prove they lived in one of the De Doorns townships before they were evicted in November.

In addition to this concern, the displaced persons interviewed also expressed concern that the materials in the pack would not be able to withstand the winter weather, as it contains plastic, rather than something more durable. According to the government representatives interviewed at the site, however, the pack adheres to international standards.

Moreover, despite government efforts to find space and provide materials so that the Zimbabweans can be reintegrated back into the townships, a number of the displaced persons interviewed on the day were unaware of what they were going to do once the camp closed. Many vowed to stay right up until that last day because they said they had nowhere else to go. One of the interviewees went as far as to say the government's plans were not reintegration but rather eviction. Furthermore, although the government has been liaising with potential landlords, the Zimbabweans said that they had not been informed of the outcome of this, so were still feeling uncertain about how the South Africans felt regarding their return.

NEXT SEASON

Although the camp seems on target to close by set date of 31st May, there still remains the overarching question regarding what will happen next season. The decreasing numbers and the plans for reintegration will likely solve the problems brought on by the camp in the short term. However, this does not necessarily mean that the long term problems in De Doorns which led to the crisis in November have been solved at their root.

Two Provincial Government officials talked at length about some of the changes made to date in the local areas in an attempt to improve service delivery as well as what was planned to try and avoid the same situation from happening next season. They mentioned that government was working on a programme to assist municipalities mainly with its communication to communities and through schools about xenophobia and the dangers of getting involved in these violent attacks. This communication was run mainly through schools and jamborees and *imbizos* where various government departments are present. They also confirmed that they were working with the municipality to bring out regular communication in the form of a newspaper/pamphlet to share information on critical issues. The municipality was also preparing a score card which they will use to measure their investment in service delivery over the last 5 years. This will be communicated to local residents who will then have an opportunity to engage with the municipality.

In an attempt to "show goodwill" from the side of the municipality, residents who lived in the flood-line areas were moved into the three surrounding townships. One of the Provincial Government officials was sceptical about this move as these residents are now requesting formal housing, a request he feels only came as a result of the move.

The displaced persons interviewed during the visit were unsure of how they would be received once they moved back into the townships. Already, a small collection has returned to South African areas in De Doorns with no reports of any negative effects. According to the Zimbabweans interviewed on the day, those returning are currently not moving to Stofland, where the majority of them lived before they were forcibly removed. Rather, they are moving to the Hassie Square township. It is currently unclear whether this reflects greater land availability in the latter, or continued feelings of hostility from the former.

The displaced persons on the camp anticipated that reintegration would be peaceful if only a small number moved back into the townships. However, they predicted that, should a vast amount of workers return to the area at the beginning of the season in September, feelings of resentment could be reignited and a similar situation to November 2009 could reoccur.

CONCLUSION

The situation has certainly improved since the last visit at the end of April. The size of the camp had decreased dramatically, and the number is continuing to drop, as transport is being provided to take the displaced persons back to Zimbabwe or to other places in South Africa. For those choosing to stay in De Doorns, government officials have been trying to find available land for them to live on, and plan to provide starter packs so that shelter can be erected. However, at the time of the monitoring, many of the interviewees were still unsure whether they had anywhere to go once 31st May came, and there appeared to be a lack of clarity over the allotment of starter packs. Furthermore, there is a number who are keen to receive compensation before they leave. Thus, although the government seems on target to have the camp closed by 31st May, it does not seem like the process will be a smooth one. Moreover, the closure of the camp does not necessarily mean that the deeply ingrained problems in De Doorns have been solved. It remains to be seen whether peace can be maintained once the Zimbabweans have been reintegrated, and once the season picks up again in September.

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.