



'We want to go on with our lives'

By Nompumelelo Magwaza

More than 100 displaced foreigners living in Durban's Albert Park have expressed a desire to be reintegrated into their respective communities, provided they are welcomed back with an assurance of their safety.

Amsi Wilondja, of the Democratic Republic of Congo, said they wanted to resume their lives, which were disrupted during the xenophobic attacks in May and June.

"Our living conditions in Albert Park are getting worse and we are ready to go back to our communities, but only if we will be safe," he said.

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Wilondja said they wanted to resume working and for their children to return to school.

The refugees have lived in a tent at Albert Park since July, after being evicted from a Broad Street shelter.

On Monday, the Umthombo Street Children came to the refugees' assistance by providing a mobile clinic.

Umthombo senior nurse Hermien Ploddenhof said most of the children were suffering from malnutrition.

"Most of the children here are coughing and have an itchy skin condition, signs that they are not receiving nutritional food," she said.

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Ploddenhof said Umthombo had offered basic medical attention but there was a need for proper intervention to monitor nutrition for children and adults.

Wilondja said the children had been falling ill in the cold.

"We sleep in tents and it is very cold at night, and that is why our children are coughing," he said.

Durban Action Against Xenophobia spokesperson Marijke du Toit said churches and non-governmental organisations had offered help in the form of tents, blankets and food.

"It is the first time that these people are receiving medical help. We are happy that there are still people who see to the needs of refugees," she said.

Meanwhile, the Gauteng government intends to shut down six temporary shelters across Johannesburg and the Ekurhuleni Municipality, where close to 3 000 displaced foreigners remain, on Friday.

Their fate will play itself out in the Pretoria High Court on Tuesday as the Wits Law Clinic and the Consortium of Refugees and Migrants in SA will fight the camps' closure.

They are seeking a court order forcing the government to introduce a comprehensive reintegration plan before shutting down the camps.

The Gauteng government recently announced that peace had returned to areas affected by the xenophobic violence and that it was safe for people to return.

But Jenny Reeves - a lawyer who helped to draw up the urgent court application - said the government did not seem to have an adequate plan to deal with the displaced foreigners who had not found alternative accommodation.

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