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## Courts asked to decide on camps

South Africa's courts have been asked to order that the temporary safe sites set up for refugees after xenophobic violence be kept open until their charges are reintegrated with communities.

The urgent application, in the Pretoria High Court, has been brought by the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) and Wits Law Clinic, they said in a statement on Monday.

The organisations have asked the court to order the government to communicate and implement a comprehensive reintegration strategy which adequately protects the rights of all.

They have also requested an order that the government restore the Rifle Range temporary safe site and not dismantle it until the comprehensive reintegration strategy is in place.

A wave of xenophobic attacks started in Johannesburg's Alexandra township on May 12 and spread around the country, leaving more than 62 people dead and 17 000 displaced, according to the police.

On Friday, the Gauteng government said the remaining 3 340 people still in shelters would have returned to their communities by August 15.

At the time, the Democratic Alliance urged the provincial authorities to start planning steps to accommodate people still too scared to return when the shelters closed.

The Commission for Gender Equality expressed concern at the arrests of 200 refugees and asylum seekers who camped next to the R28 highway, between Krugersdorp and Randfontein, after being transferred from a safe site in Glenanda, Johannesburg to the Lindela repatriation centre in Krugersdorp.

They had refused to register for temporary identity cards at the Glenanda camp, fearing these would cancel their existing immigration rights.

"... There has been no clear communication from government as to how it intends to reintegrate those remaining in the temporary safe sites across the province," Wits Law Clinic and CoRMSA said in a statement on Monday.

This despite the passing of the government's initial July 31 deadline for the closure of the temporary sites, they said.

"Last week, with the July 31 deadline looming, site managers had still not been informed whether the camps would remain open into August and contracts for security and catering had not yet been renewed.

"As such, some started making arrangements to dismantle the sites.

"We had visited some of the sites, including the site at Rifle Range, and found that no clear plan had been presented to those living in the site.

"Instead, people were being encouraged to leave the site and "go and live with friends".

"We felt this was not acceptable as a 'reintegration strategy' and have thus taken the matter to court," said Tesneem Bhamjee of the Wits Law Clinic.

Although a date for the hearing has yet to be finalised, it is expected to take place on Thursday.

She said the lack of communication over the future of the displaced foreign nationals had led to increased anxieties and fears in the camps.

Many had fled traumatic situations in their own countries and sought safety in South Africa only to be re-traumatised by the recent violence.

The ongoing uncertainty about whether it would be safe to live outside the temporary sites had negatively affected people's mental health.

"There have been reports from some of the camps that people are suicidal.

"People have become depressed and have lost hope during the recent xenophobic attacks, and the lack of clarity around their immediate future has exacerbated their feelings of helplessness.

"Given what they have already been through, it is important that they know what plans are being made to guarantee their safety once they leave these sites," added Marivic Garcia-Mall of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. - Sapa

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