

No change yet to Zim refugees' status

Sapa

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The status of Zimbabwean refugees in South Africa will remain unchanged until an assessment is done, the department of home affairs said as Zimbabwean opposition parties signed a historic power-sharing deal.

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Zimbabwe and South African government officials and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would have to meet to assess the situation in Zimbabwe before a decision could be reached, said home affairs spokeswoman Siobhan McCarthy.

"The interested parties would have to meet and sign a tripartite agreement.

"When the situation permits we will invite Zimbabweans to return home and [will] assist with the returns," McCarthy said.

She said that at the moment about 90 percent of asylum applicants had not met the requirements for refugee status and would therefore be not allowed to stay in the country.

The department expected fewer applications following the agreement.

Meanwhile, the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) welcomed the agreement, but said it will take some time before it filtered through the country.

"Just because the agreement has been signed at national level does not mean it will be implemented immediately at the local level, where some of the atrocities took place," said CoRMSA spokesman Duncan Breen.

South Africa should wait until the economic and political rebuilding process was "in full swing" before it dealt with Zimbabwean migrants in the country.


The Zimbabwe Exile Forum said the will of Zimbabweans had been respected.

"Exiles are suffering in the diaspora. They are waiting with bated breath to go back," said its spokesman Eddie Matsangaise.

He was convinced that once normality returned to Zimbabwe its nationals would return in their masses.

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The Zimbabwe Political Victims' Association was waiting for details of how the agreement would be implemented.

"Its a 50/50 situation and we are excited but a bit (wary) of ZANU-PF as we are not sure whether they will honour the agreement."

"Zimbabweans are suffering here and it will be good if the situation improves so that we can go home," spokesman Oliver Kubikwa said.

The University of Pretoria's professor in human rights Michelo Hansungule said that now the agreement had been signed Zimbabwean exiles should return home.

"Now that the framework has come into place those fearing for their lives should go home.

"They have to go home and implement the agreement. The issues of political fear and economic instability have now been addressed," he said.

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