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## NEWS



### Outrage over police raid on church

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Arrest of Zimbabwean asylum-seekers at Central Methodist Church widely condemned

JOHANNESBURG (Sapa) - A raid on the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg appeared to have been directed at homeless people and asylum seekers amid "disgraceful" police behaviour, human rights groups said on Thursday.

Spokesman for Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), Kaajal Ramjathan-Keogh, and spokesman for the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA), Duncan Breen, said officers allegedly used batons and dogs to clear residents out of the building before asking any of the residents for their immigration permits.

The raid took place in the church at 11pm on Wednesday night.

Officers at the scene cited drugs, guns and "illegal foreigners" as the purpose of the raid, CoRMSA said.

The police allegedly broke through a large number of doors inside the church and stole cellphones, television sets and the contents of the church's poor relief fund.

The officers reportedly did not find any drugs or weapons in the church, Breen said.

Asylum seekers with valid permits were arrested alongside hundreds of others who have been unable to access documentation to legalise their stay in South Africa .

Home Affairs failed to issue documents to the refugees indicating their immigration status in the country, said Ramjathan-Keogh.

The Johannesburg refugee reception office in Rosettenville remained closed since 2005 despite several High Court orders to re-open the office. All Johannesburg-based asylum seekers were compelled to go to the refugee office in Pretoria .

"Arrest and detention of bona fide asylum seekers is unlawful."

The Immigration Act stipulates that searches, with or without a warrant, must be carried out during the day, unless expressly authorised for execution at night.

The Act also stipulates that searches must be conducted with 'strict regard to decency and order' which includes the right to the protection of dignity, freedom and security, and personal privacy, said Ramjathan-Keogh.

"Any raid targeting illegal foreigners should be carried out in conjunction with the Department of Home Affairs, yet there was little evidence of a Home Affairs' presence during this particular raid," said Ramjathan-Keogh.

CoRMSA called on the South African Police Services to uphold their own administrative processes and the rule of law, and to respect the rights of documented and undocumented non-nationals in South Africa as provided for in the South African Constitution, said Breen.

CoRMSA also called for the timely provision of asylum documentation by the Department of Home Affairs for asylum seekers and refugees.

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