



Refugees appeal for more time

By Lee Rondganger and Niels Posthumus

Milenna Mpumulo knows that with every passing hour, time is slowly running out for her and her three-year-old daughter, Clauder.

On Friday, the Gauteng government intends shutting down the Glenanda temporary shelter that has housed them - along with the five other shelters spread across Joburg and Ekurhuleni, where close to 3 000 refugees still remain.

However, the refugees' fate was to play itself out in the Pretoria High Court on Tuesday, where the Wits Law Clinic and the Consortium of Refugees and Migrants in SA (Cormsa) were to fight the camps' closure.

The Wits Law Clinic and Cormsa last week brought an urgent application to halt the closure. They are seeking a court order forcing the government to introduce a comprehensive re-integration plan before shutting down the camps, which may give a much-needed reprieve to refugees who fear going back to their communities.

Mpumulo, who comes from Mozambique and was chased away from her home in Malvern in May, was not aware of the court battle before Acting Judge Piet Eberonn - but she hoped that he would rule in their favour.

"People who lived here initially have been lucky. They were able to find a place to stay and some even moved back to their homes. I am not so lucky. I only have my daughter here in South Africa and if they close the camp, we will have no place to go. I lost everything during the violence."

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

But, Jenny Reeves, a lawyer who helped draw up the urgent court application, said the government did not seem to have an adequate plan to deal with the refugees who have not yet found alternative accommodation. "We are seeking an order preventing the closing down of the camp until there is a comprehensive re-integration plan," she said.

At the Strydom Park camp in Boksburg, 589 people were still seeking shelter there. Initially, the camp housed 717 refugees.

"I just hope we can stay a little longer," said builder Oliver Sithole, from Mozambique, who fled his home at the Holomisa informal settlement.

"I can't go back now. They burnt down my shack and people have already built on my spot. I need more time to look for a new location to build a home."

Micaya Nhete, from Zimbabwe, believes that if the government extended the deadline until the end of this month, people might be able to find other accommodation. "Those that work will get paid at the end of the month. At least

they will have money to start looking for a place to rent."

But Louis Mahlalani, who lost his furniture business, has vowed not to move. "They'd rather kill me. When they come on Friday, I will just take all my stuff and put it outside my tent. They can take the tent away, but I will stay. I will live in the open veld."

- This article was originally published on page 5 of [The Star](#) on August 12, 2008

The Star

Published on the Web by IOL on 2008-08-12 06:02:00

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