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## Xenophobic victims' future uncertain

**By Kashiefa Ajam and Sapa**

Victims of the recent xenophobic attacks will have to sit tight until Tuesday.

Only then will they find out whether they will be forced out of makeshift camps around the country - because the judge hearing an urgent application by the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in SA and the Wits Law Clinic says "I am not a machine".

Acting Judge Piet Ebersohn said he did not have time to read the papers because they were not filed in time. "I'm going to postpone the case until next week. I'm not a machine," he told the applicants this week, adding that he had thousands of papers in urgent cases to read.

The Wits Law Clinic and the Consortium want the court to compel the government to communicate and introduce a comprehensive reintegration strategy that protects the rights of all.

They are also seeking an order for the government to restore the Rifle Range shelter in Joburg and to refrain from dismantling it until such time as a comprehensive strategy is in place.

The xenophobic violence that swept South Africa in May, leaving at least 62 dead and hundreds injured, marked one of the darkest two weeks in the country's 14-year democracy.

Tens of thousands of Zimbabweans, Mozambicans, Malawians, Congolese, Nigerians and other Africans scooped up their children and ran from mobs with little more than the clothes on their back.

Many were so traumatised by the violence that they rushed to board buses and trains out of South Africa. The rest - close to 40 000 at one point - piled into police stations, churches and community halls, from where most were later bundled off to government-run camps.

Now, barely three months later, the government is shutting down the shelters, leaving around 7 000 people facing an uncertain future.

On Thursday, the Home Affairs Department said it would deport the more than 100 displaced refugees and asylum-seekers who were removed from the R28 highway in Krugersdorp last week. The men were detained at the Lindela Repatriation Centre. About 80 of them have refused to co-operate with the department in finalising their claims. Those being deported have been given 10 days to appeal.

Meanwhile, medical humanitarian organisation Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) has called on the South African government to uphold its obligation to protect refugees. The camps should not be closed without viable options being made available to the displaced. This requires communication and consultation.

The uncertainty, says MSF South Africa general director Sharon Ekambaram, has

led to high levels of stress and anxiety - both of which harmed their mental and physical health.

"During the last week of July, 19 percent of the more than 300 consultations carried out were for stress-related conditions."

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