

PASSOP WATCH

A monthly overview of what's up with PASSOP



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PASSOP has launched a Gay Refugee Rights Advocacy Project

In light of the increasing number of “sexual refugees” in this country, PASSOP has launched a new program that will advocate for the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) asylum-seekers and refugees, assist with paralegal advice and empower this social group by building a support network.

PASSOP advocates for the rights of all refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants in this country, and it is high time that the plight of LGBT refugees and asylum-seekers is highlighted and supported.

Homophobia is a serious issue all across Africa. In many countries, LGBT people face constant harassment and harsh punishments, ranging from fines and imprisonments to death, solely for expressing their sexual orientation or gender identity. This unjust reality in countries ranging from Uganda to Malawi has led to an influx of sexual refugees fleeing to South Africa, one of the progressive countries that does grant refugee status on the

basis of sexual orientation.

However, despite South Africa's official position, the asylum application process is fraught with problems and many LGBT people

are being turned away unjustly. Moreover, those who are granted status still often face discrimination and harassment in their new communities in South Africa. When xenophobia is compounded with homophobia, it leaves many gay and transgender immigrants in conditions not unlike those in the countries they fled in the first place.

Recognizing the vulnerability of their particular situation, PASSOP has launched a program that will provide support and advocacy for this social group. The project's principal objectives are to assist LGBT refugees and asylum-seekers with paralegal advice regarding documentation and labour issues and to raise awareness around the issue.

The program will also monitor the South African government's performance in the asylum-seeker and refugee determination processes to ensure that it is true to its commitment to sexual refugees.



In addition to this, the program aims to build up a solidarity network to unite LGBT refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants and provide them with outlets for emotional support and counselling. In partnership with other LGBTI rights organizations, PASSOP will also promote advocacy within their communities to ensure their safety and integration.

The hope is that the program will empower these refugees and asylum seekers to engage in gay refugee rights activism and ensure that South Africa lives out its constitutional protection for the rights of gay men and women.

PW

Take Action

If you have any questions or would like more information on this program, please contact office@passop.co.za.

Fire in Masiphumelele

On the night of May 2nd a large fire swept through Masiphumelele township. It started just after midnight and grew rapidly as the strong wind fuelled it. Firemen were only able to contain it six hours later. When the sun rose, almost 1500 shacks had been burnt to the ground – around 4000 people displaced.

The fire moved with such speed that many residents had hardly any time to pack their belongings before they were forced to flee their homes. It is a miracle that only a handful of people died.

PASSOP staff and volunteers were heavily involved in the relief efforts by sourcing and organizing clothing and food donations, inputting queue management systems and assisting the Disaster Management Department in the delivery of its services. We were also able to raise over R7000 for those who lost their homes in the fire through a call for donations and organizing a fundraising event at Zula Bar on Long Street.



The PASSOP help desk office, which was intentionally located in the heart of the township in order to foster close community ties and ownership of the project, was also badly damaged by the fire. Our neighbours and volunteers poured water on our office for hours in the middle of the night to try to save as much as they could. They were able to save most of the furniture and documents. We are humbled and proud of the dedication they showed to us and feel touched to have been welcomed into the community in such a sombre way.

The majority of the shacks around the PASSOP office were completely burned down. Although the Disaster Management Department provided some materials to rebuild homes, many people have lost the majority of their household items and clothes. We have been collecting all second hand items (clothes, furniture, appliances, etc.) to distribute in the community. If you have any second hand items to donate, please drop these off at our Wynberg office at 37 Church Street.

PW

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Soccer Tournament in Imizamo Yethu



On Saturday May 7th, we held a soccer tournament in Imizamo Yethu. The tournament was one of the regular integration events that we run in the various communities from which we run our anti-xenophobia help desk project. The principal aim of the event was to bring young people together and use sport to as a bridge to overcome the divisions that often exist between foreigners and South Africans.

The event was a big success, as eight teams and almost 100 boys and young men from the community participated in the all-day tournament. At the lunch braai with all the participants, PASSOP staff and volunteers gave speeches in which messages of unity and equality that we advocate for were highlighted.

PW

Opinion

A Snapshot of Life in Zimbabwe

PASSOP Volunteer Doug Leresche recently returned to his home in Zimbabwe for the first time since 2004. Below are some of his impressions of the current situation.

If you have the capital to start something and even a slight entrepreneurial inkling, Zimbabwe is where you should be. If you are greedy and have little conscience, your chances at success and obscene wealth are even better. It is a country with unbelievable potential and with so much having been divested over the last decade, the opportunity for investment now is ripe. Unfortunately if you are a government employed

teacher, nurse or other low ranking civil servant the picture isn't so pretty. You are looking at US\$200 a month in a fragile economy that is based on the US\$ and where the cost of living rivals that in most developed countries.

How do teachers survive on so little? First of all, it should be said that even this is a lot more than what they were receiving in 2008. Secondly, almost every old teacher of mine that I spoke to has something else "on the side". Whether it is tutoring wealthier children or buying and selling an imported commodity they are able to obtain; this instinct and stubborn determination to live is a testament to the spirit of the Zimbabwean people. These civil servants and others alike, who continue to struggle to survive just so that they may carry on providing such a valuable service, keep the light burning at the end of the tunnel. The men

and women who earn a meagre salary; the gardeners, street cleaners, maids, supermarket attendants, electricians, plumbers and labourers all continue to persevere. They find a way to survive and live. Meanwhile in this parallel universe there exists a minority; a multi-racial upper class that has managed to profit and benefit in ways that your “average Joe” from anywhere in the world would struggle to fathom. These people have used their political or financial status to benefit themselves and those in their immediate circle immensely. This creates a harsh dichotomy that somehow co-exists in unison.

As a Zimbabwean who has been away for 6 years, I look and see so many wrongs that could easily be made right. The basis for my judgment is Zimbabwe in 2004, which in the grand scheme of the last 10 years, was far from the lowest point. It is 2008 that the people who have never left use as a measure. A time when cholera was claiming hundreds of lives a week, when there were a total of 128 teaching days throughout the year, when the sanitation department ceased to function and the doctors and nurses were out in search of their next meal and were simply not able to treat patients.

So when one looks at Zimbabwe today in comparison with the Zimbabwe of 2008, one can see where the optimism that I saw all around me comes from. One can begin to see that, while the journey is going to be long and tough, Zimbabwe is beginning to climb out of a very dark decade in her young history.

I once benefited from these services that, if still available today, are not of the same standard that they were in the late 1990’s. I am resisting being too optimistic so soon. Yes, I believe that since 2008 there have been

positive developments in the political, and certainly in the economic arena, but I am still hesitant to talk of our transition back to the Jewel that we once were.

Having met and interacted with many Zimbabweans, both at home and in the Diaspora, there are valid reasons for hope. It is the people of Zimbabwe are what keep this hope alive. I think that perhaps Zimbabwe is on the verge of a transition period and is ready for the people to take back what is theirs, to utilize the skills and knowledge their home country and the other host countries provided them, and rebuild and develop Zimbabwe. But whether this is the beginning of the new Zimbabwe or just another carrot to keep the donkey walking remains to be seen in the coming months and years.

I am a see-saw of optimism and pessimism. Zimbabweans from the Diaspora are investing and assisting “back home”. I see the herculean efforts of those committed to making the best of a tough situation. I take heart that a few of those who have grown excessively wealthy plough back into their old schools and communities.

These all give me seeds of hope. I want so badly to be optimistic; having been back and seen everything running as close to normal as is possible in such difficult circumstances. But when I remember that all of this optimism for the future is dependent on a stable and open political system, I become a little dejected. I truly believe that better things are to come for Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans, but this will not come until there is a legitimate, free and fair political platform upon which the rights of the people are heard, protected and fought for.

PW



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