

PASSOP WATCH

A monthly overview of what's up with PASSOP



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PASSOP releases “Road to Documentation” Report and Home Affairs Responds

Carly Oboth *PASSOP INTERN*

After weeks of monitoring and data analysis, PASSOP released a report, “The Road to Documentation: Asylum Seekers’ Access to Cape Town’s Refugee Reception Centre” on 31 May 2011.

The report commented on the Department of Home Affairs efficiency and capacity to serve asylum seekers. In the two weeks of monitoring, PASSOP staff documented 1659 asylum seekers, who were turned away for having the wrong documents or no documents at all, or because there were too many people in the queue, as well as a number of other legitimate and illegitimate reasons.

The report also cited cases of maltreatment, in which security guards beat people with whips and wooden sticks. In addition, PASSOP monitors found that some asylum seekers were required to pay the permit expiration fines of R2 500 even if their permits expired while queuing. The full version of the report can be found on our website.

Following the report launch, the Department of Home Affairs responded swiftly and positively; a representative asserted they would look into our report findings and issue a comprehensive response. Home Affairs also stated they were reviewing their current refugee and immigration policy and anticipated changes that would “streamline and fast-track the application for refugees.”

While PASSOP is wary of what the measures that lead to this streamlining will entail, we will keep a close eye on any developments and we appreciate the concerted effort on the part of the Department of Home Affairs in their effort to improve the documentation process for Refugees. We have periodically, without warning, sent our monitors to track any improvements and thus far, our feedback has been positive.

PASSOP will be restarting the monitoring of the Reception Centre in the coming weeks to make sure that the improvements are both effective and permanent.

PW

On Visiting Polokwane

Braam Hanekom *PASSOP DIRECTOR*

Named one of “the 200 young South Africans” by The Mail and Guardian, Braam Hanekom was invited to attend an event hosted by Michelle Obama. However, following the recent episodes of xenophobic violence and growing tension, Polokwane seemed much more urgent.

Braam left Cape Town for Johannesburg and then instead of attending the planned event, drove straight to Polokwane. The week before, The City Press reported there had been 2000 displaced Zimbabweans and 2 deaths. His visit was unannounced, unplanned and was “unofficial”, but it followed a press statement that PASSOP issued calling upon the ANC to deal decisively with councillors accused of perpetrating xenophobic violence.

This would be the twelfth time PASSOP would engage with displaced people following different incidents of xenophobic violence. We have seen many different responses from government, depending largely on the local municipality and local police. In De Doorns, for example, the displaced were threatened and told “not to talk to media” following their displacement, which was largely due to the councils involvement in the instigating the xenophobic violence. Whereas in Mbekweni the police and council went out of their way to support and assist the displaced persons, highlighting the influence that local police and councils can have on xenophobia.

Braam attempted to visit the displaced Zimbabweans upon arrival in Polokwane in the early hours of morning, but was unable to locate them. The following morning he found 15 Zimbabweans at the Seshego police station. They were part of a larger group of 28, who had been sleeping and living at the police station since the attacks. They had lost most of their possessions and were now homeless.

To assess their situation, Braam first analysed their treatment in their current conditions, asking a few questions to establish if they had been intimidated or threatened by officials. He next tried to establish where everyone else was, followed by assessing their current living conditions and finally their intentions and/or ability to reintegrate. They were clear that they had not been threatened following their displacement. They reported that they think the majority of the displaced had fled the area and moved into surrounding townships. Some, they said had returned to the same township.

The displaced reported that they had been receiving food from COSATU members, they had been given some items from the local ANC branch, that they were given food by the Red cross and that they were feeling safe, thanks to the police. They also reported that they were willing to reintegrate so long as they could move to areas “500 meters” from where they were displaced.



Largely an unemployed group, some had lost their jobs as a result of missing work following their displacement, thus their limitation was mainly financial. It was a relief to hear that the local ANC councillor, who is accused of inciting this violence, in the eyes of the displaced, acted without the support of the local ANC.

PASSOP has decided to help raise money to enable these displaced Zimbabweans to move on with their lives. We aim to raise R10 000.00. To assist in any way, please contact us at office@passop.co.za or come by our office.

PW



Take Action

To assist the displaced refugees in Polokwane, please contact PASSOP on email office@passop.co.za.

Swaziland Democracy Campaign

Rebecca Potts PASSOP INTERN

In April 2010 major representatives and advocates of the Swazi people responded to the worsening struggle in Swaziland by mobilizing in Johannesburg to launch the Swaziland Democracy Campaign (SDC).

SDC is a coalition of progressive organizations inside Swaziland and in South Africa that are united around the demand for multiparty democracy, peace, and security in Swaziland, which is currently facing a political, economic, and social crisis.

On June 9, 2011 PASSOP hosted a meeting to discuss launching a chapter of the Swaziland Democracy Campaign in the Western Cape. PASSOP Director Braam Hanekom asserted that the location of Parliament in the Western Cape allows for unique access to politicians and allows for the ability to put pressure on them.

Another panel member, Mike Louw of COSATU, explained that close economic ties between the two countries increase the influence South Africa has on the Swazi government for affecting real change.

The third panel member, Martin Jansen of Workers of the World, added that more than half of the Swazi budget is dependent on the South African budget. The meeting ended with a unanimous vote in support of establishing a SDC chapter in the Western Cape.

The official launch of the chapter is set to take place following a workshop on July 9, 2011 in the Salt River Community Hall at 9:30am. The workshop will provide a forum for further discussion of the Swazi situation, an opportunity to formulate strategies and an action plan for applying pressure on the South African government, as well as a chance to gain advice from individuals from the SDC in Johannesburg concerning the development and direction of the Western Cape chapter. The workshop will conclude with the official launch of the Western Cape SDC chapter.

For more information on the Swaziland Democracy Campaign, please visit www.swazidemocracy.org.

PW

Over 200 attend PASSOP Community Event in Masiphumelele

Susan Varghese *PASSOP INTERN*

On Saturday, June 25, PASSOP staff and volunteers held a Zimbabwean Dispensation Project information session at Masiphumele Primary School. With the enthusiastic help of Charles Jqijqi and other community leaders, PASSOP was able to successfully inform over 200 Zimbabweans on their rights relating to the Zimbabwean Dispensation Project, hear about the issues individuals were facing with passport and permit applications, and provide support and assistance.

PASSOP's Anthony Muteti, Langton Miriyoga and Caroline Theron presented on the ZDP application process and how to go about obstacles and complications. Volunteers and interns helped applicants to fill out appeal forms, answer surveys and informed individuals about the Help Desk located in Masiphumelele. The event was rounded off with a hearty meal cooked by Zimbabwean and South African cooks. PASSOP continues to work tirelessly to inform as many people as possible on the Dispensation Project before the deadline on July 31st and encourages all applicants to reach out for assistance.

PW



World Refugee Day

what 'refugee' actually means

Doug Leresche *PASSOP STAFF MEMBER*, Braam Hanekom *PASSOP DIRECTOR*

On 20 June, nations across the globe celebrated World Refugee Day, a holiday created by the United Nations in an attempt to bring awareness to those forced to flee their countries as a result of war, oppression, persecution and other human rights violations that threaten their safety.

The UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines refugees as those “unable to return to their native land due to fears of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality and/or membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, over 42 million people were displaced in 2010, an increase from 17 million displaced people in 2009. This massive increase is mainly due to the impact of “mega-disasters” such as the massive floods in China and Pakistan and earthquakes in Chile and Haiti. Even today, the long-standing debate continues over the definition of refugee, and therefore, who qualifies as a refugee.

It is unfortunate that this reality hampers the humanitarian efforts aimed at protecting and defending the rights of displaced peoples around the world. Additionally if an asylum seeker fails in his/her “refugee status determination”, he/she can be refused refugee status and be deported. In today’s world, one can be forced to flee for a multitude of reasons; economic and climate factors are beginning to dominate the “push” factors that result in the mass migration trends we are seeing around the world. Climate plays a central role in all of this. With droughts come increased food prices and economic strains on a country; drought and poverty can lead people to face starvation if they don’t migrate. In some countries there are corrupt leaders, there is a lack of political stability and elections are not free or fair, which leads people to flee from the resulting extreme poverty and hardship.

Sadly according to many countries, these forced migrants do not meet the UN definition of the term refugee and thus the UNHCR have no obligation to assist them. Their need for refuge is questioned--merely because of an absence of war—and their refugee status denied, which deportation becomes a veritable reality.

PASSOP advocates for all people and, while we appreciate and support World Refugee Day, we do so with the entire global community of displaced peoples and forced migrants in mind, not just those lucky enough to be termed “refugee”.

If governments continue to deny forced migrants the right to refuge and thus deny them refugee status, perhaps we need to enact a “World Forced Migrants Day” in order to globally conscientise their undeniable hardships.

PW

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