

PASSOP WATCH

A monthly overview of what's up with PASSOP



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Confusion rises around ZDP and Deportations



The Department of Home Affairs' (DHA) Zimbabwean Dispensation Project (ZDP) has reached its originally proposed deadline on the 31st of July. In the weeks leading up to this, PASSOP appealed to the DHA for an extension to the deadline. Thankfully, the DHA just announced that it would implement a 'grace period' in order to continue issuing the outstanding permits.

The new provisional deadline for this grace period is the end of August. Although this grace period is a welcome move, it is highly unlikely that the additional month will suffice in issuing the outstanding permits. The DHA would do well in admitting this openly, rather than refusing to label this grace period an extension.

It is also unclear whether the moratorium on deportations of Zimbabweans has now been lifted or whether it is still in place. The most recent press conference by the DHA on August 1st only deepened the confusion around the matter. Civil society was not consulted and there is no clarity concerning the current situation. What is clear is that this confusion is causing a lot of anxiety amongst Zimbabwean communities across the country.

Based on our close monitoring of the process at the Wynberg DHA offices, it is also clear that the DHA is at present far from completing the ZDP project. According to the DHA itself, only 133,810 of the 275,762 applications had been issued as of the 30th of June, leaving over half of permits (over 142,000) that still needed to be issued. Although it is unclear how many were issued in the month of July, if the progress at the Wynberg offices is anything to go by, there are likely to be in the region of 80,000 – 100,000 permits that remain to be issued.

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Through interaction with thousands of Zimbabweans in recent weeks (approaching our monitors at Home Affairs, calling or visiting our office for assistance) we are doubtful that the new August deadline will be met. For example, there remain thousands of applicants who are yet to receive even a confirmation SMS indicating that their permit application has been logged into the central database.

This includes those waiting for the Zimbabwean Consulate to issue the outstanding passports and those who have not yet been instructed to report to the DHA and have their fingerprints taken—a process which can only be done after your application has been logged.

The mathematical requirements of distributing somewhere in the region of 90,000 permits in 20 working days, which translates into roughly 4,500 per day, is no small feat. Our monitoring at Wynberg DHA office, which is by far the largest in the Western Cape Province, in the last week of July found that, on average, only 30 permits were issued per day.

Unless capacity is seriously strengthened at DHA offices around the country, it is highly unlikely that this mammoth task will be completed before September-October. It would be of great use if the Department admitted this openly, because refusing to do so creates widespread confusion and anxiety amongst Zimbabwean communities across the country. This anxiety is heightened by the new threat of deportation, around which there is even less clarity. This is anything but constructive, and the anxiety it is causing can surely not be the objective of the DHA.

PW

Message from the Director: **Calling for calm**

Much has been written, said, and speculated in recent days and weeks about the end of the moratorium on the deportation of Zimbabwean nationals, which was supposed to have happened this Monday, August 1st.

However, following a DHA press conference that day, nobody is now quite sure on whether deportations of Zimbabweans now recommenced or not. It is a shame that the DHA is deliberately not informing civil society and the media, because the lack of clarity has caused widespread uncertainty and fear amongst many Zimbabwean communities across the country.

Although it remains to be seen what action the DHA will undertake in the coming weeks and months, it is unlikely that it will revert back to the policy of mass deportation that was in place before 2008, when over 200,000 Zimbabweans were deported every year. Rather than starting to panic now, PASSOP urges all undocumented Zimbabweans to remain calm. At

present there is no indication that mass deportation will recommence. Our staff is nonetheless always available to give any advice regarding options for documentation.

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One thing must be clear: PASSOP stands firmly opposed to the deportation of foreign nationals. We believe that it is an inhumane, unethical and un-African practice.

Moreover, the socio-economic and political preconditions in Zimbabwe have not yet been created to make it safe for Zimbabweans to return home. We will monitor the next moves of the DHA closely, and take appropriate anti-deportation action if necessary. But for now, it is best to remain calm.

PW

Update from Anti-xenophobia Help Desks

By Anthony Muteti HELP DESK PROJECT COORDINATOR



PASSOP's engagement with the Imizamo Yethu and Masiphumelele communities, where we operate anti-xenophobia help desks, picked up pace in recent months.

We have produced in recent months CVs for over 400 people. The number of clients at our help desks increased further in the days approaching the end of moratorium on deportations. In addition, there were also other noteworthy developments. In Masiphumelele, after raising approximately R8,000 for the victims of the fire that occurred in May, we distributed this money amongst twenty five families whose shacks were completely destroyed by the fire, most of which was located near our help desk. Most of the families were South African.

We also created a register of all foreign nationals in the township who were not able to access the aid distributed by Disaster Management services in the wake of the fire due to lack of ID's.

We were also able to organise and distribute food and clothes that were donated to this group of people with the help of other NGOs and local churches. More recently, in the last week of July, we held a transitional justice workshop in coalition with Zimbabwe Exiles Forum, which over 100 community members attended.

In Imizamo Yethu, on the 2nd of July all roads in the community seemed to lead to our help desk where we held an informative workshop on documentation requirements. Close to 200 people attended the event. Moreover, on that day, Madi-ba's birthday, the PASSOP team joined forces with community leaders and volunteers to clean up and paint the local library. Rather than just spending 67 minutes there, we took the whole day to get the job done.

We are now planning on bringing the local churches together for an anti-xenophobia Sunday service in the next few weeks.

PW

PASSOP uncovers hostage case

On Friday, 1st of July, PASSOP staff member Arafat Matovu received a tip-off that two young Ugandan men were being held hostage in Johannesburg. After conducting an investigation, we were able to contact the victims.

They confirmed that they had been assaulted and were now being detained by the man who had invited them to come to South Africa with the promise of jobs. They had been tricked and were being held hostage until their families in Uganda transferred a ransom to the man holding them captive in his house.

We contacted the local Police Station, in Tembisa, close to where the victims were locked up. The police officers acted swiftly with the information we supplied them and worked very hard to locate the exact location late Friday evening. Together with the police, we set up and coordinated a sting operation to rescue the victims.

We organised contact with the captor for the victim's sister and arranged for the 'money' to be delivered that evening. When he opened the doors, the police stormed in, arrested the perpetrator and were able to free the victims before any further harm was inflicted on them.

We must compliment the efforts of the officers at Tembisa police station and the professional manner in which this operation was conducted. We were able to arrange for one of the two victims to return home to Uganda, and found accommodation for the other with a good Samaritan in Johannesburg.

Sadly, we are certain that this is just one of dozens such cases that occur every day, in which vulnerable foreigners are being exploited when they arrive in South Africa.

PW

Opinion Piece: **Extend and expand the ZDP to other foreign nationals**

By **Mandisi Majavu** PASSOP VOLUNTEER AND INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER

The Zimbabwe Dispensation Project (ZDP) comes to an end in August 2011. Home Affairs Deputy Director General Jackie Mckay is quoted in the media as saying that: “we will conclude the adjudication of the applications by July 31 and finalise all outstanding matters in August.”



Reports abound about whether the South African government will, after August 2011, deport all undocumented Zimbabweans living in South Africa, given that the minister of Home Affairs stated intent to begin ridding the country of undocumented people from other African countries after she has finished with Zimbabweans. In actuality, it is more than likely that the Department of Home

Affairs (DHA) is going to intensify a crackdown on all undocumented people after August 2011.

The irony is that in certain cases the DHA is to blame for the undocumented people in the country. A recent research study by PASSOP shows that scores of people are often turned away on a daily basis from the Refugee Reception Office (RRO) in Cape Town, “rendering them undocumented through no fault of their own.” PASSOP monitored the RRO for two weeks in April and during that short time period 1,659 people were turned away for various reasons.

It is partly for the factors highlighted above that the PASSOP report argues that the RRO in Cape Town is operating at an under-capacity in comparison to the numbers of people applying for papers. I am of the view that instead of penalizing immigrants for something that is beyond their control, the South African government ought to consider extending the concept of the ZDP to other foreign nationals from the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The SADC region is moving towards a free trade area. Research shows that the opening up of national economies has largely been accompanied by the increased mobility of labour across borders. Interestingly, the proposed Protocol on the Free Movement of People in SADC of 1995 had initially also put forward an ‘open borders’ concept; i.e. SADC citizens having free movement within SADC.

It is also worth noting that many people in the SADC region live in poverty and view South Africa as a place with many economic opportunities. Although South Africa has its own problems and challenges, the truth of the matter is that South Africa is the economic powerhouse not only in the region, but on the entire continent. In fact, SADC member states have a combined Gross Domestic Product of some US \$432 billion - 65 percent of which comes from South Africa alone.

It should be noted that South Africa is the economic powerhouse that it is today partly because of the immigrants from SADC countries who helped build the country’s economy. Research conducted by the SAMP shows that throughout the 20th century, at least 40 percent of the mine workforce was non-South African. And my view is that it is not unreasonable for people to want to share in the fruits of which they have helped us to build.

Opinion Piece: Life as a gay refugee in South Africa

By Junior Mayema PASSOP VOLUNTEER

Life in South Africa as a gay black foreigner is a horrendous nightmare. Well, many days I wish it were just a nightmare. But it is the reality for me. This reality is one full of intolerance, discrimination, and prejudice. I am a refugee and a gay activist – this is my story.

I fled my home in Congo after my mother tried to inject me with a syringe full of gasoline when she discovered that I was gay. My friends and family shunned and banished me. My life was in danger and I had nowhere to go, so I came to South Africa.

I came full of hope that things would get better; that I would be able to live my life without fear of being persecuted for who I am. And in some ways I do feel safer here than I did in Congo. But after being here for a year, I can honestly say that this hope did not come true.

Life is tough here. Firstly, there is a lot of homophobia in the Congolese community in South Africa. When I first arrived, I lived with my cousin. When he found out from my family in Congo that I was gay, he kicked me out on the street. My mother ensured that no other family member in South Africa took me in after that. Since then I have moved around a lot, living with different Congolese people, but the story is always the same: once they detect that I am gay, they kick me out.

I also lived in some shelters and there I experienced xenophobia from South Africans. Even some members from the South African LGBTI community were not helpful. Their priority is to help South African LGBTI individuals, but other LGBTI refugees, like myself, have less access to support groups and assistance. It is tiring to be reminded every day that you are 'not a South African', and it hurts even more when it comes from other LGBTI people.

I wish I could just get to my feet and find a job. But finding a job in South Africa is tough enough as it is; trying to find a job as an openly gay foreigner is close to impossible. I have been looking for a job since I came here and I felt that most of the managers were judging me by my 'gay' physical appearance.

Although the South African constitution protects LGBTI people from discrimination, homophobia is deeply rooted in South African society. The majority of South Africans, like in most other African countries, think homosexuality is a western culture emulated by some African youths who are being recruited by white sugar daddies into homosexuality.

What can be done to change the desperate situation that I and countless other LGBTI refugees in South Africa are facing? Changing the culture of homophobia is difficult, but it has to be done, step by step. More people need to start campaigning against homophobia within our communities.

We need to raise awareness and take action against xenophobia and racism in parts of the South African LGBTI community. We need to create a shelter or accommodation for LGBTI refugees in South Africa to help them get on their feet. We have to build up a job referral system for LGBTI people to tolerant or 'gay-friendly' businesses and managers.

It is unlikely that things will get better in the near future. Yesterday I got kicked out by yet another Congolese host, on my 24th birthday.

But hope is what dies last.

PW

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