

# PASSOP WATCH



A monthly overview of what's up with PASSOP

**August 2011 - Issue 7**

## In This Issue:

- **Horn of Africa Relief Fundraiser - a Huge Success**
- **Update on the Zimbabwean Dispensation Project (ZDP)**
- **SAPS settles with PASSOP's Director over unlawful detentions**
- **APPS Report highlights relationship between mass deportation and xenophobia**
- **LGBTI Film Festival Panel Discussion**
- **Disabled Children's Assistance Workshop**
- **REFUGEE STORIES**
- **OPINION PIECE: Implications of the changing SA Immigration Policy**



## Horn of Africa Relief Fundraiser: A huge success!

PASSOP, in partnership with the Muslim Judicial Council, the Institute for Healing of Memories, the African Arts Institute, the Somali Refugee Aid Agency and the Scalabrini Centre organised the Western Cape Fights Famine - Horn of Africa Relief fundraiser.



The event took place on 27 August at St. Joseph's Marist College in Rondebosch and featured a wide range of performances by musicians, dancers, drummers, and poets from different African countries.

The keynote speaker was Mr. Marius Fransman, Deputy Minister for International Cooperation, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu contributed a special video message.

We are proud to say that the fundraiser was a huge success, with over 150 people attending. The speeches, particularly Archbishop Desmond Tutu's, stirred urgency for the famine and the need to take action in solidarity with the countless people starving to our north.

We were able to raise R8,500; all of which went directly to the relief effort to the Gift of the Givers Foundation. We also raised awareness around the issue through several radio interviews, newspaper articles, and a segment on ETV.

We would like to once again thank all the attendees who showed their support and to all those who donated for their generosity.

**PW**

# Update on the Zimbabwean Dispensation Project (ZDP)

As August comes to a close, a month after the originally stipulated deadline, the ZDP is still in full swing. Despite reports from the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) that all permits had been adjudicated before the end of July, we spent the past month advising, informing, and assisting thousands of Zimbabweans who were still awaiting Sms's confirming receipt of their application and instructing them to appear for their fingerprints to be taken. It is clear that the process is far from complete.

A recent press statement by the DHA explained that members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) have been trained and will be deployed to the various regional offices to increase their capacity and efficiency toward finalising and completing the process. While we welcome this move because of the large number of people still awaiting permits, we remain very cautious about the fact that the people assisting are defence force personnel. We have received assurance from the SANDF that their assistance is to be purely administrative and there will be no chance that this could lead to violence or the deprivation of human rights.

In Cape Town, the processing of all ZDP-related matters has been moved from Wynberg to Boston House, Vortrekker Road, Bellville. This is a larger area that is better equipped to deal with the large volumes of people that will be served in the coming months. Taking this and the presence of SANDF into account we too have increased the number of monitors present at Boston House to assist those filling in forms and ensuring the process continues smoothly.

As far as how long this is all going to take, we can only make an educated guess. Our monitors informed us that those who had their fingerprints taken in the last week of August were informed to come back for their permits in 'two to three months'. Based on this and our data regarding the number of applicants still awaiting an Sms instructing them to go and do their fingerprints, we can confidently estimate that this process will only be concluded towards the end of 2011.

**PW**

## SAPS settles with PASSOP's Director over unlawful detentions

**While helping asylum seekers obtain documentation in January 2008, Braam Hanekom suffered targeted and unlawful arrests.**

He immediately embarked on legal action against the police as he believed that his rights were violated and that he had suffered damage to his reputation. His matter was to finally be heard in the high court on August 31st, however half an hour before court proceedings the state offered a settlement which included full payment of all his legal costs (high court) and payment of an undisclosed amount of money.

We hope that police officers will realise that reckless behaviour on their part will not go unchallenged by members of the public. We welcome the settlement as we were confident in his case and during litigation the legal costs would have escalated. These costs are ultimately paid for by citizen and immigrant tax payers and would amount to an additional hundreds of thousands of rand being wasted. Braam has undertaken to donate every cent of his payout to human rights work, not only through PASSOP but also through other local organisations.

**PW**

# APPS report highlights relationship between mass deportation and xenophobia



A report released by the Africa Project for a Participatory Society (APPS), in partnership with PASSOP, has underlined our view that a return to mass deportation of Zimbabwean nationals would increase xenophobic tensions and could trigger violence, as happened in 2008. The violence in 2008 was in large part a result of police raids on suspected illegal immigrants. The connection between state action and xenophobia is clear: mass deportation has been correlated with increased threat of xenophobic tensions and violence.

The [APPS report](#), compiled by conducting a survey of South African residents' views on deportation and its potential impact on xenophobic tensions, lends support to this view. The report argues that state sanctioned anti-immigrant action has the capacity to instigate vigilante anti-immigrant action.

The report also confirms the negative effects resulting from the lack of communication from the DHA regarding the future of the moratorium on deportations of Zimbabwean nationals. It is currently unclear whether the moratorium has been lifted, and when deportations will resume. This lack of clarity has resulted in confusion and anxiety in Zimbabwean communities across South Africa. Official statements from the DHA maintain that mass deportation will not commence upon revoking the moratorium, but in the face of the vague and unclear next plan of action, this guarantee is not enough to ease the uncertainty.

The uncertainty and anxiety endured by many at the hands of the vague ZDP policy is disturbing. The suffering caused by mass deportations would be tremendous. When compounded with the threat of xenophobic violence, it is clear why PASSOP is appealing to the DHA to exercise caution and restraint in the coming months. For the immigrants living in South Africa, South African citizens and the image of South Africa as a whole, a return to the divisive and un-African practice of mass-deportations must be avoided at all costs.

**PW**

## LGBTI Film Festival Panel Discussion

By **Kara Yun** PASSOP VOLUNTEER

PASSOP took part in the recent screening of the South Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, *Out in Africa*, on 18 August at the Nu Metro Cinema at the Waterfront. PASSOP was invited by Gender Dynamix to join the panel discussion following the screening of the documentary, "Getting Out," produced by the Refugee Law Project in Kampala, Uganda.

The documentary followed the lives of five LGBTI refugees: Val, Leon, Nyombi, Florence, and Tatenda. By documenting their struggles of getting out of their brutally homophobic, transphobic, and prejudiced home countries (Uganda, Zimbabwe, and DRC) and the difficulties they face in becoming documented in South Africa and the United Kingdom's flawed asylum system, it shed some light on the harsh reality that LGBTI refugees live with.

Following the screening, PASSOP addressed and engaged the audience about the issues raised in the documentary. What followed was a lively discussion around the difficulties of LGBTI refugees integrating into South African communities. The discussion called for the urgency needed to improve the current systematic discrimination and marginalisation of LGBTI refugees.

**PW**



## Disabled Children's Assistance Workshop

On the 19th of August PASSOP conducted an informational workshop with parents of disabled children at our offices in Wynberg. The workshop marked the end of the research and information-gathering phase of the Disabled Children Support Project (DCSP).

Participants were presented with the findings of four months of research. The research included both a survey of affected families to uncover the difficulties they face, as well as research into the different charities and service providers (hospitals, schools, day-care centres, etc.) and the assistance they are able to provide to families with disabled children.

The findings of the report that were highlighted at the workshop are clear: the level of assistance that foreigners with disabled children access is much lower than South African families with disabled children.

This is the result both of a lack of assistance available as well as a shortfall of information available to foreigners. To address this, participants were given in-depth document packs providing details on each of the different charities and service providers that offer assistance. The next phase of the project will provide case-by-case assistance to families in accessing assistance.

**PW**

# Refugee Stories: Back from the dead

By Katy Gaines PASSOP VOLUNTEER

**It's not all distrust and xenophobia – there is also compassion, kindness and love for foreigners in South Africa, as this story of Ugandan Ssekamatte Charles shows.**

*Imagine lying at the side of the road in a township on the outskirts of Cape Town. You're dirty, disoriented and desolate, but people and cars just go about their business. It's the middle of winter and you're thousands of kilometres from home. You are alone and cannot communicate with anyone around you because you're mentally ill. You don't understand your own situation – you are completely lost. Months go by.*

A kind old woman finds you and luckily for you, sympathy and her maternal instincts kick in as she offers you sustenance and a place to stay. Your situation improves but you're still in a foreign land, far from any family you might recognize, and unable to communicate with people around you speaking a foreign language. You're still lost; still unbearably alone.



**“After being lost and believed dead for so long, the family said it was a miracle to see him again.”**

This is the story of Ssekamatte, a Ugandan man who was living and working alone in Cape Town when his mental health suddenly deteriorated, became unemployed, homeless, and lost.

On Saturday, 20 July, PASSOP member Arafat Matovu heard about a mentally disturbed man in Khayelitsha that had been found and taken in by an elderly Xhosa woman, Cynthia Sonxi. That very same day, Arafat visited Cynthia and she told him about Ssekamatte. She said she couldn't communicate with him since he didn't speak Xhosa or English, but that she was sure that he could only get better if he would be reunited with his family. She asked Arafat to help find them.

Also from Uganda, Arafat was able to communicate with Ssekamatte in Lunganda and, after a few dead ends and many phone calls later, obtained the address of his wife and family in Uganda. When he called the family and told them that he was with Ssekamatte Charles, they started crying – they had believed Ssekamatte had died when they didn't hear any sign

of him for almost half a year. In their search for him, they had been tricked numerous times into giving money to people who claimed to have found him. They had lost hope when Arafat called.

Less than two weeks after first contacting the family, Arafat accompanied Ssekamatte to Pretoria, where he explained his story to the Ugandan Ambassador. Ssekamatte was granted free travel documentation. Because no other organisations were willing to assist Ssekamatte, PASSOP assisted the family in flying him back to Uganda. After being lost and believed dead for so long, the family said it was a miracle to see him again. Arafat has spoken to Ssekamatte and his family every day since he returned home and Ssekamatte's situation has improved steadily.

In a country where xenophobia dominates the headlines, it is these stories of kindness and compassion that are too often drowned out. Ssekamatte was lost when Cynthia offered him a helping hand, food, and shelter; asking for nothing in return. After being trapped in loneliness for months, Ssekamatte trusted someone who reached out to him. She brought him back from the dead.

South Africa needs more stories like this one of Ssekamatte and Cynthia.

**PW**

# Human Trafficking & Prostitution *on our doorstep*

On the 24th of August, PASSOP employee Yolanda found a woman who was cold, wet and shaking on the streets of Wynberg not too far from our offices. After finding out briefly her situation and name, Happiness was brought to the PASSOP office where she was given some hot coffee, food, clothes and a blanket. While she was warming up, PASSOP helped her get into contact with her father and step-mother in Johannesburg, who she had not spoken to since disappearing 4 months ago.

Happiness grew up in Limpopo. In 2004 at the age of 17 she moved to Johannesburg with her family where she completed her Matric (high school diploma). After high school she went on to Tshwane College in Pretoria where she studied electrical and construction infrastructure. Unfortunately Happiness could not stay there long because her father became unable to continue paying the fees and she was forced to leave after only 5 months. With no money, Happiness moved in with her sister Rebecca in Alexandra Township, where she received financial support from both her sister and her father when possible.

While in Alexandra, Happiness met Martha. Martha moved to Cape Town in 2009 but returned to Johannesburg in May of 2011. Martha told Happiness about a job she could get for her in Cape Town doing domestic work. Faced with little real opportunity in her current situation, she decided to make the move to Cape Town. Upon arriving in Cape Town on the 13th of May, Happiness discovered that the domestic work she was promised was actually prostitution and Martha's Nigerian boyfriend was to be her pimp. For two months she was sent out every night to work, returning in the morning when she was forced to give her earnings to Martha's boyfriend who would repay her with drugs. Happiness was also told that there were men working for her pimp out on the streets, watching her and making sure she was picking up enough clients. While working, she made anywhere from R400 during the week to R700-R1000 on weekends; none of this money she was allowed to keep.

Finally in mid-June, Happiness ran away, but with no money or friends to turn to in Cape Town, she was forced to live on the streets. While on the streets, she met a man named Francis who offered her shelter and promised to buy her a ticket back home when he had the money, and in return she was to work for him. Francis, who at first appeared to be a good samaritan, also gave her heroin and cocaine and locked her in his house to cook and clean. She escaped this, which meant returning to the streets for the next two weeks until she stumbled into Yolanda and made her way into the PASSOP offices for assistance.

PASSOP has since helped Happiness to travel back to Johannesburg, where she will be in touch with trusted contacts who will help her get her life back on track, including work, health care and drug rehabilitation.

**PW**

# Implications of the changing SA Immigration Policy

By **Samuel Duru** *PASSOP VOLUNTEER*

One of the major challenges facing asylum seekers in South Africa is the layers of red tape they must wade through to determine their refugee status. Although the relocation of the Refugee Reception Centre (RRC) from Nyanga to Maitland in September 2009 was a positive step toward providing a safer, more efficient, and less corrupt RRC, much remains to be done. This becomes particularly pressing in the face of a changing South African immigration policy, including a shortened transit visa of only five days, increased prison terms for undocumented individuals, and an expected increase in deportations. We are extremely critical of these changes, particularly in the absence of a significant improvement in the efficiency of services offered to asylum-seekers.

Asylum-seeking applicants are still subjected to a dysfunctional queue management system, incidents of violence, widespread corruption, inadequate sanitation facilities, a lack of information, and a general inefficiency. These findings and many more were reported in detail in a recent monitoring report released by PASSOP in May. Since the release of the report, the Maitland RRC manager has been suspended and some positive changes have occurred, including that security guards no longer hit clients with make-shift whips. PASSOP will very soon carry-out a follow-up monitoring effort to analyse the sustainability of these changes.

What is already clear is that there is an urgent need to construct, implement, and monitor an effective queue management system that works to eliminate and prevent the chaos and corruption that is plaguing the RRC at the moment. PASSOP is working on designing an action plan to provide practical recommendations and assistance in doing exactly that. Only if an effective queue management system is implemented, will the inefficiency, violence, and corruption be reduced, and asylum-seekers given a fair chance to comply with the changing immigration rules and regulations.

**PW**

# Down with Xenophobia!

A poem by **Samuel Duru**

*I loathe your brainless and morbid attitude.*

*You make us treat our own like aliens*

*An African*

*as a foreigner on African soil*

*unthinkable!*

*May the potter of all flesh*

*requite those who sowed*

*a discordant seed*

*amongst mankind*

*designed to be one.*

*It's a seed that spreads like wild fire*

*and uses unsightly fruit*

*to impair unity and oneness*

*and we permitted it.*

*The gruesome tree from which it comes*

*stifles life, liberty,*

*and the serene abode*

*of all races, creeds and colours.*

*We must now cut down that tree*

*lest ere long its acerbic logs*

*come hard upon us,*

*the beauties and the beasts,*

*and mar our dazzling futures.*

*That tree breeds an ill-wind,*

*a wind that blows away*

*the intent of diversity.*

*Concertedly sharpen axes,*

*and cut down that baleful tree*

*and burn it and bury its ashes*

*because only then can we climb*

*the true tree of life*

*which our heroes,*

*past and present*

*stepped on thorns to plant.*

*True trees bear the fruit of love,*

*peace and commonality*

*and shade and house*

*the brotherhood*

*and dignity of man.*

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## Donate to PASSOP

PASSOP depends largely on donations from its supporters without which we would be unable to operate efficiently as a small NGO. To donate, contributions can be made to:

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