

PASSOP WATCH



A monthly overview of what's up with PASSOP

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Moratorium on Deportations lifted underhandedly by the DHA

The Department of Home Affairs' (DHA) Director General, Mr. Apleni, effectively lifted the moratorium on the deportation of Zimbabweans by issuing an internal directive on 27 September 2011.



Upon hearing of this move, PASSOP issued a press statement exposing the DHA's action. The DHA returned fire by issuing a press statement entitled 'PASSOP must stop pretending to be the spokesperson of Zimbabweans in South Africa'. This statement did not, however, deny any of the claims made by us and was instead merely an attempt to distract from the real issue.

The moratorium had been in place since April 2009. Mr. Apleni took this action without informing civil society. Worse still, it contradicted his recent statements to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs (PPCHA), where he declared that no Zimbabweans would be deported until the Zimbabwean Documentation Project (ZDP) was completed, appeals reviewed and the Minister approved deportations. The ZDP is not yet completed - tens of thousands of permits that still need to be issued. We launched a complaint with PPCHA about this lack of transparency and apparent dishonesty.

It also recently came to light that 55,000 people were deported last year, even with the moratorium for Zimbabweans in place. With this gone, that number is likely to rise three-fold.

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A significant increase in deportations threatens the stability of South African communities, as happened in the 2008 xenophobic violence. It also inhibits the 2011 Census from clarifying the number of undocumented foreign nationals living in South Africa, a number which is hotly contested.

It is not only the rise in deportations that is concerning, but also the way in which deportations have been carried out. Women carrying infants are being arrested when going to renew their permits at the Refugee Reception Offices, detained in prisons and deported without being able to return to their homes to collect their belongings. We stand firmly against the deportation of all humanitarian migrants, but if the DHA continues deportations, then they should at least be carried out in a more transparent, humane and dignified manner.

PW

Workshops with Migrant Farm Workers in De Doorns



In light of the lifting of the moratorium on deportations of Zimbabweans, PASSOP has been receiving an increasing number of calls from worried Zimbabweans working in the vineyards of the Breede River Valley. To answer their many questions, address their concerns and give advice on their documentation statuses, PASSOP staff held three communal meetings in De Doorns throughout October. Many of these farm workers are in desperate situations as they are stranded without valid documentation, unable to work and at risk of being deported.

PW

Opinion Piece: Double dealings, deportations & simmering tensions between foreign nationals and South Africans

It is not to misuse Bertolt Brecht's insight nor an exaggeration to point out that the animal that gave birth to the 2008 xenophobic violence is in heat again.

According to recent media reports, the residents of Alexandra---where the 2008 xenophobic violence started, are threatening to violently evict foreigners from the houses they claim should be theirs. In 2008 the residents had initiated pogroms against foreign national under the pretense that they were carrying out a legitimate community intervention to control the rising tide of crime, which they blamed foreigners for.

What is different this time around is that residents are bold and speak freely about the threat of xenophobic violence. According to the Sowetan, the residents have put up posters warning foreigners to vacate RDP houses in extension 10 of Alexandra. It is also reported that threatening letters and pamphlets have been delivered to the houses occupied by foreign national. The Sowetan reports that one of the letters warns that: "We demand that you vacate at your own free will without being pushed like animals or aliens".

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What makes the situation dangerously volatile is that these threats against foreign nationals are being made when the moratorium on deporting undocumented Zimbabweans has been lifted by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA). Whether these two developments are related remains a moot point. It is however worth pointing out that the xenophobic attacks of 2008 could have been, in many cases, triggered by the raids of immigration officials. Hence PASSOP is concerned that immigration raids have the potential to serve as a catalyst to a new round of violent xenophobic attacks à la 2008 pogroms.

It is unclear if the DHA has observed this frightening pattern. What is crystal clear though is that since the lifting of the moratorium on deporting undocumented Zimbabweans, there has been an increase in the number of immigration raids all over the country. For instance, in Cape Town mothers with little children are being arrested without warning, detained and deported. Since there is no deportation centre in Cape Town, this means that once arrested in immigration raids, deportees are held with hardened criminals in Pollsmoor prison.

It is a human rights violation to detain refugees and migrants in a place like Pollsmoor prison where hardened criminals who have committed crimes such as murder and rape are imprisoned. Additionally, Pollsmoor prison is chronically overcrowded, documented to be a site of mass rape of inmates by members of prison gangs, and does not meet any of the minimum standards of temporary detention for 'illegal foreigners'.

Further, it reveals mala fides on the part of the South African government that the moratorium was lifted when the Zimbabwe Dispensation Project (ZDP) is incomplete. Research shows that "as of October 4, 145 000 permits were dispatched of 275 762 that were received, though processing was still taking place." Additionally, the South Africa's director-general of home affairs, Mkuseli Apleni, gave his word to parliament that deportations would not resume until the ZDP was completed.

What has changed now?

PW

Update: Susan Forgives



On October 12th PASSOP organised a fundraising concert for Susan, the 23-year old Zimbabwean woman who had acid thrown in her face by a stranger two months ago. The event raised R7000 that will go towards Susan's facial reconstructive surgery.

Susan's story was also broadcast on eTV's 3rd Degree, and within hours, the Facebook account that we set up for her had over 4,000 friend requests. The outpour of support from people around the country has helped Susan in coping with her difficult situation.

Protest in Polokwane against xenophobic violence



On 18th October, PASSOP and VOM organised a protest in Polokwane during a court hearing there of 12 people, including a newly elected ANC councillor, charged with inciting xenophobic violence in July.

The 12 are being charged with arson, murder and public violence which left more than 3 000 Zimbabweans displaced.

During the outbreak of violence, the mob stoned to death Zimbabwean, Godfrey Sibanda. The mob also torched the RDP houses inhabited by Zimbabweans.

The ANC distanced itself from the incidence and publicly condemned the violence. Civil society organisations and the media have been closely following the matter to ensure that justice prevails.

The protest was attended by more than 80 people and local media covered the event. The hearing was postponed to the 1st of December 2011.

After the protest, PASSOP officers travelled to Musina to see the situation on the ground at the border at a time when speculation over the resumption of the deportation of Zimbabweans was rife.

PW

SABC Special Assignment Episode on LGBT Refugees

Following a proposal pitched by PASSOP, SABC's Special Assignment aired an episode on October 20th entitled "Illegal to Be Me" that highlighted the experiences of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa.

The show discussed some of the many hardships and dangers that these refugees faced in their home countries, as well as the difficulties and discrimination they have to cope with once arriving in South Africa. The episode can be viewed [here](#).

Special Assignment is watched by between one and three million people in South Africa alone, and is screened all across Africa (through the DSTV network), making the screening of this episode a major step towards raising awareness around the issue gay rights in Africa.

The level of homophobia even in the South Africa, the assumed 'safe haven', becomes apparent when reading the hundreds of comments that users left on Special Assignment's official Facebook Page. One commenter casually stated that "**gays must be killed like dogs with rabies.**" Another prescribed that "**it's easy, let's pass a death sentence for all gays ... gays deserve to die.**" Some worried that LGBT refugees will "corrupt the minds of our children and before we know it, every kid will either be gay or lesbian." These comments highlight exactly how important public advocacy around the issue of gay rights in Africa is.

Volunteering with PASSOP

Intern Luke Riley reflects on his time at PASSOP

As classes wind down and summer approaches, many of the PASSOP interns begin to board flights home. Whether their time at PASSOP has been the defining commitment of the semester or an opportunity just to help out when possible, the thought of leaving forces one to reflect on the significance of their time spent volunteering.

I came to PASSOP not knowing what to expect; I liked the thought of fighting for people's rights, though I confess I had little conception of what that really meant. While my understanding is still far from comprehensive, PASSOP offered me the exposure necessary to gain an idea of what it actually means to fight for the oppressed and the vulnerable.

From menial tasks like typing up CVs to more engaging work involving research and writing, I began to understand the complexity of PASSOP's work, and the organization required to carry it out. Not only was I exposed to the organizational aspect, but also to the issues themselves. I never would have learned so much about the hardships caused by the difficulties in obtaining documentation or delved so deeply into the causes of xenophobic tension without encountering suffering individuals that forced me to confront these issues head on.

From an improved understanding of the workings of a grassroots human rights NGO, to a greater awareness of current issues in Southern Africa, as well as the opportunity to use this increased knowledge to help those in need, I feel I have spent far longer than a semester volunteering in Cape Town. While my time at PASSOP has been fleeting, I am confident the impact will be lasting.

PW

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