

South Africans reach out

Public praised for assisting refugees

May 26, 2008 *Edition 3*

Daily News Reporters and Sapa

South Africans have opened their hearts to refugees of xenophobic attacks and Durban aid organisations and churches have appealed for more help. President Thabo Mbeki in his address to the nation on television and radio last night singled out for praise the many South Africans, black and white, who have condemned the barbarity and offered food, shelter and clothing to the victims. He asked that citizens reject the criminals and "extend a hand of friendship to our foreign guests who are fellow human beings". Mbeki, noting that it was Africa Day, said the country marked the day with "our heads bowed" and lashed out at the savagery of the past two weeks, condemning the violence as "an absolute disgrace".

ANC president Jacob Zuma, visiting violence hotspots in Gauteng, made it clear the government and the party would not be able to begin addressing socio-economic problems in the flashpoints while violence raged. More than 50 people have died in the attacks and at least 30 000 have lost their homes, mainly in Gauteng and Cape Town. Hundreds of families have also suffered in Durban and have fled to the safety of police stations in Chatsworth and Cato Manor.

In Durban, many local churches and non-profit organisations are working furiously to provide support to victims of xenophobic violence. Bishop Rubin Phillip, Anglican Bishop of Natal and chairman of the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council and a member of the Diakonia Council of Churches, has appealed to the public to lend a helping hand. The Diakonia Council of Churches is working closely with affected parties, offering counselling, arranging shelter and providing food with the help of the public. "There doesn't seem to be an end (to the violence) in sight. Therefore, we continue to appeal to the public to come forward to provide basic food items, blankets and even little items like disposable cups," Phillip said. He commended the people who have already made donations, saying they have done "marvellously well".

Emmanuel Cathedral in the city centre, which has taken in more than 400 foreigners, has appealed for help in obtaining mobile bathrooms, toilets, clothing, food and mattresses. The co-ordinator for disaster management at the church, Hupenyu Makusha, said more refugees are expected as they are brought from police stations where they have sought refuge.

The Organisation of Civic Rights (OCR) co-ordinated a meeting at the Diakonia Centre on Saturday to address the concerns of immigrants and refugees. "Refugees and immigrants needed to be told and given affirmation that South Africans do care and love them and are prepared to do whatever is necessary to ensure peace," said Dr Sayed Iqbal Mohamed, chairman of the OCR. About 650 foreign nationals attended the meeting, which included representatives from the SAPS, Metro Police and the South African Human Rights Commission. After the meeting, 81 homeless immigrants were given temporary shelter for the night at the Diakonia Centre, along with blankets and food. Mohamed commended religious and non-governmental organisations as well as the police for their "exceptionally swift response".

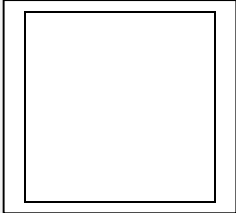
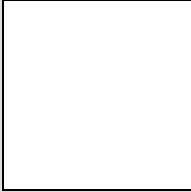
The South African Red Cross Society is also working together with smaller organisations to co-ordinate relief efforts. "We have been handing out blankets and food parcels to the victims in all areas. "While the Red Cross doesn't normally focus on accommodation, we are having a meeting to discuss the housing of those people who are currently housed temporarily in Cato Manor and other areas," said Derek Naidoo, spokesman for the Durban branch. Provincial Social Welfare MEC Meshack Hadebe yesterday visited refugees at police stations in the city. He said the provincial government was working hard to ensure the well-being of victims by delivering food parcels, blankets and mattresses to refugees. Travel arrangements were being made for those wanting to go home.

OCR's Report UpDate : Refugees and immigrants

Saturday May 31, 2008

A quick overview of the position of refugees / immigrants in Durban's inner city from OCR's record

Briefing Document

2003 - 2008	OCR's contact with the refugee / migrant tenants in country's inner cities: Cape Town, Durban, East London, Johannesburg through "sweatshops / workhouses" and buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ OCR's direct intervention with tenants assaulted, evicted, displaced. ♦ Surveys of tenants in specific buildings ♦ Taken up with national minister several times and on national housing / Tribunal task team
Homeless survey April 2008: Results: May 20, 2008	OCR's contact with Durban's city's homeless early this year, questionnaires administered in April 2008	Majority immigrants See below "Summary of the survey results"
from 20th May - Site visits	Police stations, streets,	Various NGO bodies, SAPS involved – exceptional work No co-ordinating structure as at May 25
Public meeting: Sat May 24, 2008 Diakonia Centre 	approx. 600 refugees and immigrants	Committee of 10 representing six countries 
May Sat 24, 2008	89 mainly Tanzanian male adults refuse to leave Diakonia Centre Given overnight shelter at Diakonia Centre, food / blanket. May 26 details taken down by Layers for Human Rights Provided tempt shelter with Diakonia's intervention	want UN to assist with repatriation Appears to be a group who use "refugee status" as excuse to enter RSA several times – money received taken home
meeting: Mon May 26, 2008		Specific issues: e.g. political refugees: Repatriation not an option Rental, possible eviction Request urgent meeting with the highest political leadership and UN Report back on Wed 28 May
General comments	Many reports to OCR upon investigation reveal rumours, perceived intimidation	

ACTION REQUIRED

Specific issues affecting political refugees:

Committee of 10 requested an urgent meeting with high profile political leadership and UN, if possible by Sat May 31, 2008

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

Number Interviewed: 358 individuals

16 main questions and sub-questions

The homeless on the streets do not receive any social benefits with self-employment as street vendors as the main source of income. While OCR's 1997 Survey confirmed previous research results of South African women pre-dominating the streets as "pavement dwellers" and street vendors, this Survey reveals a change in the demographics. Majority of the "pavement dwellers" are male with people from a number of African countries (51%) more than South Africans (46%). The largest number of homeless come from Tanzania (83 persons) followed by the second largest groups: Democratic Rep of Congo (20), Kenya (19) and Burundi (18).

"Pavement dwellers" who stated their area of origin as South Africa, are represented by 106 persons from across the KwaZulu Natal province, including rural areas, followed by Eastern Cape (14) and Gauteng (12). Twenty nine people said that they were from South Africa and it was therefore not possible to establish the province of origin and specific locality.

There are more males (74.3%) than females (25.6) with the majority of the homeless (78%) being single and 30 years and younger. Poverty appears to be the main reason people are forced to live on the streets with R4.00 (four rands) a day being the average income.

Sayed Iqbal Mohamed

031 3046451 OCR;

Fax: 0866 907651

email: civicrights@ocr.org.za

Angel Paulsen : 031 2508500

031 208 1527

email: paulsena@johncom.co.za