

## **MINUTES**

### **INTERFAITH MEETING: Wednesday 30 July 2008**

A meeting was held between various representatives of faith based organisations (FBOs) who've housed refugees during the crisis and the TAC. It was held in order to share experiences, strategise on a way forward now that many of the community sites are closing down and establish exactly how government will compensate these faith based organisations for their efforts. The discussion also centred on how reintegration can be supported by FBOs and how some have managed to help current IDPs do so successfully.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum (WCRLF) – John Oliver  
Lentegeur Mosque Representatives  
Jewish Board of Women – Viv Anstey  
Seapoint Synagogue Representative  
Pinelands Methodist Church – Pastor Mike Crochet  
SHADE/WAREHOUSE Representative – Craig Stewart  
TAC representatives  
PASSOP

## **DISCUSSION**

Introductions were done for each participant and then Bashier of the Lentegeur Mosque opened the discussion with a description of the situation at his mosque at present. At the moment they still house around 25 refugees and have thus far had no response from government for reintegration.

John Oliver of the WCRLF said his role has been one of coordination and support and that he represents the religious leaders on the Safety Forum.

Mike Crochet at the Pinelands Methodist Church said that they first housed 102 people at the beginning of the crisis and that there was a large exodus of people about two weeks after it first started. They are now at 48 people which by Friday 1 August would have all been reintegrated thanks to the support of two independent donors at the church of a sum of R55 000. He said that in their search for alternate accommodation the IDPs did not want to return to 'black' townships. The church was able to pay the first month's rent as well as the initial deposit on accommodation for all their IDPs. Mike mentioned the fact that there was great camaraderie amongst the people housed at the church and its members, and cited the fact that the group was almost all from the DRC. He said that because of this there was a great support system within the IDP group and that therefore it had been easier for them to find jobs and accommodation as they were all looking out for one another. He said that most of the group were going into a much better situation than what they'd been in before.

Viv Anstey explained how the Jewish community had played a role in the crisis, explaining that it had housed up to 225 IDPs at the beginning of the crisis in the Weitzman School hall, it has now helped some of these people back on their feet. She said that at present they are still working with a group housed at the Barrack Street Lodge where they've paid for accommodation for them. There are about 120 people still living here and they are actively trying to find them employment. Viv said that there are about 40 people in her group that want to be repatriated and that they are putting lots of pressure on the Premierships Office for answers to a plan for the compensation of FBOs which have helped alleviate the crisis. She also mentioned the problem with volunteer burnout and the extra pressure this puts on those left on the ground.

Craig from the SHADE/WAREHOUSE group explained that SHADE deals with the Methodist Churches and WAREHOUSE with the Anglican churches. He said that he has been working with these as well as churches centred in the townships, and community halls. He said that through various networks most churches have found alternate accommodation for their IDPs and that there has been notable success in Khayalitsha. He said that their focus is now on working toward a long term plans around poverty and debriefing their volunteers with the Trauma Centre.

The discussion moved toward that of a reintegration plan and TAC explained how government was not prepared to give any money for reintegration but that its strategy may be that it will source money from a third party to pass onto FBOs to use to finance IDPs wishing to reintegrate.

Mr Abrahams of the Lentegour Mosque said that they had heard the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) had received R3million from the Saudi government. He went on to say that this had been given by the Saudi government for the MJC to use for everyone affected by both the xenophobic violence and the recent Western Cape flooding as food relief and that it was not specifically for those just affected through xenophobia. He went on to express concern that the MJC was only offering food parcels to be collected by those helping the refugees when the mosque desperately needed its electricity bills paid and had reported this to the MJC, who agreed to do so but has not yet provided assistance in this regard.

Viv Anstey reported that she had managed to secure a meeting with the Premiere that day at 12.30. She said that the Jewish Centre had come to the end of its assistance in the crisis as it felt it was precluding government's role in the crisis and that it was now to be held accountable. She had therefore been putting a lot of pressure on the Premiership's Office to answer the question of compensation for FBOs, a process which she'd already started through meetings with Galiep Gallant, a mediator in the Premier's office.

It was explained that government seeks to close all camps and community sites by 3 September. It will then try and rationalize these into two larger camps, one in Retreat and the other in Milnerton.

The issue of a new email from government to FBOs to submit their costs for housing refugees in order to claim back and be compensated for this was brought to the table's attention. Not everyone had received this email and it was further discussed. A copy was handed out to all present and it was decided that

those on the civil society platform which meets with government would get clarity on this form from their weekly meeting on Thursday. It was decided that it would be best if all FBOs were using the same form so as to make it a unified response on the part of FBOs as well as to make it a fair process as their were general concerns that some smaller, more independent sites would be overlooked in this process. TAC agreed that it would advocate for the rights of the FBOs to be properly compensated if the need arose. How this would be carried out is that once confirmation on the form was given, it would be sent out to as wide a mailing list as possible, and that all those who did submit this form would simply send TAC an email stating that they had done so and when, so that TAC can follow up with the JOC or government where it has the means, on behalf of FBOs, if there is no response to these submissions.

Concerns were also raised however as to the submission of these costs, as the letter states that a submission must be accompanied by original invoices in order to be considered. Obviously this would prove problematic for some and this is why confirmation on the process was needed from those with a platform to government. Otherwise, everyone was grateful that some sort of process around compensation had presented itself.

It was noted that for some poorer churches, using whatever money they received for compensation toward the reintegration of IDPs would be difficult, and in some cases, impossible. Whereas in wealthier churches this money could then be put to assisting the reintegration of IDPs.

The conversation turned to the role of FBOs in the long term reintegration of IDPs and how these organisations could play an effective role in this process. It was noted that FBOs were able to act as mediators or educators of society and that this position of FBOs within communities should be used to assist those trying to reintegrate. It was decided that a comprehensive list of those FBOs willing to help with reintegration in the long term would be drawn up, so as to start a database of people committed to changing various communities' attitudes and smoothing the way for refugees going back.

It was noted that the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) has been mandated by the ANC to do research of a long-term vision and attitude plan around African and South African identity and the interplay between the two.

In terms of repatriation there will be a plan around this either by the International Migration Office (IMO) and the UNHCR as churches and mosques and various other FBOs have no real money to undertake this.

It was decided that representatives from various townships would come to the Protection Committee meeting on Monday so as to properly inform the workshop on a list of safe areas in which reintegration may be possible. It was explained that the Protection Committee, from its workshop, would come up with a set of documents with real working strategies for reintegration, drawn up by as wide a group of people on the ground as possible and that these documents would then inform the Safety Forum and hopefully government.