

**NEWSLETTER #7
TO ALL DISPLACED PEOPLE
IN THE WESTERN CAPE
LIVING IN CAMPS AND SAFETY SITES**



**URGENT UPDATE ON CONSOLIDATION, STORMS, CLOSURE OF
COMMUNITY HALLS AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS.**

Below: UNHCR tent at Blue Waters after storm on Saturday 30 August 2008



STORM DAMAGE TO CAMPS

On Thursday 28 August 2008 the City of Cape Town and Provincial Government of the Western Cape began moving displaced people living in community halls and selected camps to Blue Waters and Harmony Park camps.

This was done to improve delivery of humanitarian relief, and also to facilitate reintegration, repatriation and resettlement. The second purpose was so that the City could 'prepare the community halls for the busy season'.

The process went ahead with many displaced people not knowing dates, times and destinations. The UNHCR had supplied some tents, but not all of the tents and ablution facilities were ready for use. The tents supplied by the UNHCR are not suitable for winter conditions. A major storm was forecast, and some people were moved in the rain, with their belongings being transported on open trucks.

On Saturday the storm struck in the afternoon, and all the camps were affected. At Youngsfield Military Base were reports of a 'mini-tornado', which knocked down 31 tents, toilets and some of the phone boxes in which people were sheltering, injuring three people. One giant tent was erected on Sunday.

At Soetwater government postponed further moves of remaining people due to the weather.

At Harmony Park eight tents blew down, and others leaked. No government or UN officials visited, and no warm food was served after 10:30am on Saturday. The remaining tents are full of people, including children who are upset that their first weekend living in a tent was accompanied by a major storm. There are brick bungalows at Harmony Park, but these are locked.

At Blue Waters the new section was devastated by the storm; all the UNHCR family tents were destroyed, and more than 300 people had to crowd into two large tents that remained standing. The electricity went off, leaving people to try and find shelter and protect belongings in the dark.

At Silwerstroom, 83 people have been left without food and water for six days. 41 of these are children. They are been sheltering in the toilet blocks as the tents were destroyed in the storm.

Throughout the weekend, the wind and rain continued, creating difficulties for those trying to salvage belongings, rebuild shelters and cook food. Most clothing and bedding was soaked, and the remaining accommodation is insufficient for the people staying at the camps. Children and women are staying in the same tents as men, and it has been difficult for Muslims to observe Ramadaan, which started on Monday 1 September.

Once again, displaced people have been forced into shelters that are inadequate, have experienced trauma and loss of remaining belongings, and are unable to continue rebuilding their lives. People have had to miss work, and babies, children and old people have spent a miserable weekend exposed to the worst possible weather.

According to weather reports, more rain and wind is expected over the next few days.

For assistance with storm damage, or for concerns regarding humanitarian aid, please speak to your representative leader or site manager. Loss of property due to the storm damage or to theft should also be reported.

TAC has condemned the inadequately prepared-for move, and has asked that the City and Province urgently shelter displaced people in fixed (brick) buildings, and that they make no further attempts to relocate people. TAC is approaching the UNHCR for assistance with the storm damage, and asked that they work more closely with government in providing humanitarian aid and also monitoring of those wishing to reintegrate.

The City of Cape Town issued a statement saying that they would resume moving new people into the two camps on Saturday 6 September. They also stated that 315 people were moved into the camps, while 265 people 'chose to reintegrate'.

Many chose to reintegrate with communities rather than be moved to camps that are distant from schools and places of work. Since moving dates were not properly communicated, many have reintegrated without proper preparation, and have been struggling to find accommodation. TAC has information that those who chose to reintegrate were not offered transport, money, food or any other kind of support. This is despite government stating that assistance is available for those willing to attempt reintegration.

Should you hear of anyone who has attempted to reintegrate but has either not had the resources to do so, or has experienced violence or intimidation, these can be reported to:

For practical problems: Cape Town Refugee Centre: 021 762 9670

For safety and security threats (to report violence against reintegrated people): Call Braam Hanekom (PASSOP): 083 256 1140

Below: Tents at Blue Waters after storm: Saturday 30 August 2008



GAUTENG

Site assessors from the Western Cape will go to Gauteng this week to assist civil society in assessing the camps and safety sites housing displaced foreign nationals. Gauteng has lacked a coordinated humanitarian relief drive, and as yet has had no proper assessment of the

needs for food, shelter and documentation. The data collected will help to give a more accurate impression of the situation to both government and those providing humanitarian assistance.

TAC is assisting civil society in this drive, together with civil society. While the Western Cape has had many problems, there have been many benefits recognised by those observing from Gauteng. One major difference has been that in the Western Cape a Joint Refugee Leadership Committee was established to interact with civil society, government and other agencies. In Gauteng there is scattered leadership with no interaction between the camps. The displaced people in Gauteng need coordinated leadership, and a TAC representative will help them to establish a committee modelled on the Western Cape.

The other model was the Displaced People's Report, first version published in July, which gave a breakdown of how many people were living at sites in the Western Cape, and what their needs are. This report has been invaluable in terms of quantifying the disaster, and reinforcing the argument for improved conditions in the camps.

UNHCR

TAC is in the process of lobbying the UNHCR for more action on behalf of displaced people. There have been many complaints that the UNHCR is not helping displaced people, and have failed in their mandate to protect them. There are those in the camps who are waiting specifically for assistance with repatriation and resettlement: the UNHCR and government must start to engage meaningfully with these people, and make every effort to facilitate these processes. Having fewer people in the camps would make it much easier for government to provide humanitarian assistance.

Pressure is also being put on the UNHCR's international office to address the South African situation specifically, and not to refer to their mandate as it stands, which does not make provision for a situation such as this.

With consolidation likely to be complete in the next few days, the City of Cape Town, Provincial Government of the Western Cape and the UNHCR, together with displaced people, now have an opportunity to address individual requests, and to find a resolution to the crisis which is now in its' fifth month.