

MINTUES

PROTECTION COMMITTEE MEETING: TUESDAY 29.07.08

A meeting of the Protection Committee (PC), which informs the Safety Forum (SF) on ways in which it can ensure and aid the safety and protection of IDP's within communities, was held at the Human Rights Commission offices in Adderley Street last Tuesday. The PC reports to the SF which has the opportunity to put pressure on state departments for change with regard to the protection of refugee's.

PARTICIPANTS

Passop

Sonke Gender Justice

UNHCR

Trauma Centre

TAC

Joint Refugee Leadership Committee (JRLC)

OH

DISCUSSION

Sonke Gender and Justice Project explained that it had an anti-xenophobia programme running within communities at present.

Braam of Passop explained how afraid most refugee's are of the SAPS. He said one reason for this could be that he has heard of instances where at Christmas time policemen go around arresting immigrants of a particular community as a 'gift' to the people who live there. He said issues like these are ones which should be taken into consideration in the protection of IDP's.

The UNHCR said that it would take information from these meetings back to the Joint Operations Committee (JOC) because there was no direct communication from refugee sites to government. It stressed this was a platform in which to influence government activities and policy.

The committee agreed that the protection of IDP's would be approached from a rights based perspective and that this is core to the issue of safety and protection.

It would line up all the groups involved in the safety of immigrants and hold a discussion of all the issues that affect IDP protection. From this it will work out a referral pathway of these issues for sites, as well as form different groups around which advocacy can take place. For example: women and gender based violence, children and education, physical protection and legal rights.

It was decided that the PC must come up with a guideline/set of standards on the protection of IDPs, what defines a safe/dangerous area in which to live and what constitutes a xenophobic attack.

It was said the best way forward would be to identify the issues facing the protection of IDPs and prioritise these, then divide them into manageable chunks of work that can be taken on by various advocacy groups.

It was said that the plan for reintegration has not been operational but rather just informative. It was decided that we need indicators on certain areas that are safe for people to return, information on what

takes place when they go back in, and whether facilitators have been involved in aiding people and educating them on the ground.

One IDP from the JRLC said that the issue around peaceful reintegration would not be solved unless government addressed the basic needs of poorer communities as refugees could see that there would be no end to the problem unless the root causes were changed.

The UNHCR said in response that we would then have to list these socio-economic root causes of poverty, ask government if they've done social transformation and provided developmental funding and ask them to respond on this.

Another IDP offered a suggestion. He said that if the community leaders could meet, together with the SAPS of the area and the refugees wanting to move back, then there could from this be a commitment from all parties involved to ensure the safety of the IDPs and peace within that community.

TAC suggested that the government officials responsible for these particular areas also be involved in this process of educating and preparing communities for subsequent reintegration.

IDPs were asked to draw up a list of guidelines they think would aid their reintegration.

HRC said it would be good to ask government to commit to an 18-month promise in which it would monitor the reintegration at sites.

Vicki said that it would be good to ask coalitions to include refugees in their policy as some were reluctant to do so.

The Trauma Centre reminded all present that the issue of violence within communities toward refugees was a many layered one. It is as a result of rapid urbanization, a young democracy, the humiliation of apartheid and the over identification of poor South Africans with their fellow Africans, also trapped in the same cycle of poverty and poor education.

OUTCOME

A workshop was planned for all present, as well as others who will be important contributors to the discussion of the safety and security of refugees back into communities. It was decided the workshop will run all day on Friday 8 August in order to draw up a comprehensive set of guidelines for reintegration and ways in which this can be put into practice on the ground. From this meeting we will draw up a set of documents to present to the Safety Forum who will lobby this cause with government.