

SOUTH AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

132 Adderley Street
7th Floor
ABSA Building
Cape Town
8001

P O Box 3563
Cape Town
8000

Tel: (021) 426 2277
Fax: (021) 426 2875
<http://www.sahrc.org.za>



To: M.E.C. for Education, Honorable Cameron Dugmore
cc: Cindy Mafanga-Kibi, Dr. Sigamoney Naicker, Mr. Eugene Daniels, Mr. Melvyn Caroline
Fax: (021) 425 5689

16 July 2008

Dear Sir,

Re: Right to Education of Internally Displaced Children

The Human Rights Commission would like to express its deep concern regarding the lack of formalized education for children who have been internally displaced as a result of the xenophobia attacks. Many of the 100 or so school-aged learners residing in the camps still do not have access to formal education, despite the fact that schools opened for the start of the second half of the year on 14 July 2008.

Leaders from the Soetwater, Youngsfield, Harmony Park, BlueWaters, and Silwerstroom camps have also reported that the camps lack basic school supplies, curriculum, and consistent volunteer teachers who can provide formal education. Silwerstroom camp in particular is isolated, with the nearest town of Atlantis situated about 15 km away, making transport to school difficult.

Parents of children within the camps have also expressed concern that their children are falling behind in their studies because of lack of transportation to schools. Those few children that are currently attending school are relying on volunteers for transport, which is not a consistent, reliable, or long-term solution.

While we acknowledge your efforts to formulate a comprehensive strategy for addressing this crisis, we are concerned that seven weeks after the attacks, the children's right to basic education as outlined in the Constitution still has not been realized.

Our offices have worked closely during this crisis with your offices and are dismayed that despite enormous efforts from many of your Departments officials that the right to education of these vulnerable learners is yet to be realized in any tangible manner.

We urge the Department to implement a concrete plan to provide safe transport to the internally displaced children either to their former schools or to schools near the camps, provided that the schools ensure a safe learning environment for the children.

Know your Rights. Accept your Responsibilities

Chairperson: NJ Kollapen; **Deputy Chairperson:** Z Majodina; **Commissioners:** K Govender, T Manthata, L Wessels
Chief Executive Officer: T Thipanyane

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In addition, we urge the Department to provide a holistic approach to educating internally displaced children, with a particular emphasis on addressing trauma experienced by the children through the help of child psychologists, therapists, and school counselors.

We trust that this matter will be dealt with as a matter of high priority and that the necessary arrangements will be made for these learners to receive education forthwith.

Yours Sincerely,

Judith Cohen
Head of Parliamentary Program
Acting Provincial Manager – Western Cape
Human Rights Commission

cc: Premier E. Rassool
Fax: (021) 483-3421

cc: Hildegaard Fast
Head of Provincial Disaster Management in the Department of Local Government
Fax: (021) 483-4493

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